

THE BUSINESS, TECHNOLOGY & ART OF ANIMATION AND VFX

March
2014

ANIMATIONTM MAGAZINE

DreamWorks' Time Machine Brings Mr. Peabody and Sherman to 2014

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Movie Snaps
into Place

+

New Winter
TV Toons:
Breadwinners,
The Mixels and
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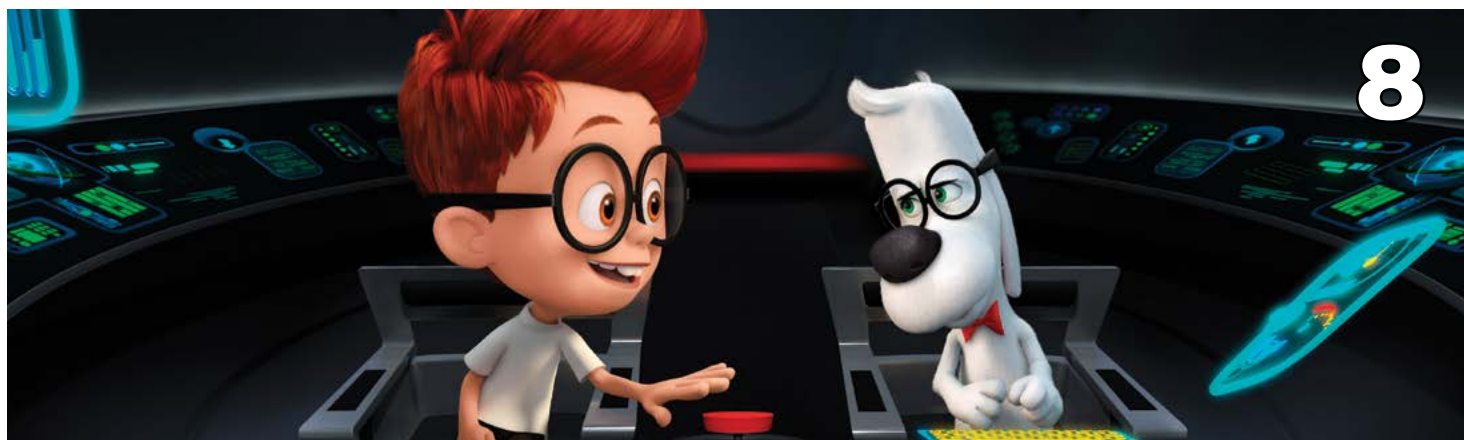
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Go inside the National Film Board of Canada in Montreal, where animator Janet Perlman is keeping warm this winter by working on a new 2D animated short film called **Monsieur Pug**.



Cover: DreamWorks Animation revives **Mr. Peabody & Sherman** for our main cover, while the Cartoon Movie edition features Xilam's **I Lost My Body**.



Log On & Toon Up!

Our giveaway for next month is ReelFX's **Free Birds** on Blu-ray/DVD (courtesy of Fox Home Ent., out February 4)

Visit www.animationmagazine.net to win!



You can tell the European feature business is in good shape when the annual Cartoon Movie in Lyon, France, is showcasing 59 promising new titles. Of course, these Euro pics are in various stages of production—from development to final finished form—but a quick glance at the 2014 edition's program proves that there is much more diversity and the bold embrace of offbeat subjects and styles in Europe than in the United States.

In this issue, we will provide you with a quick look at some of this year's big contenders, which include Jacques-Remy Girerd and Benoit Chieux's *Aunt Hilda*; Esben Toft Jacobsen's *Beyond Beyond*; Torill Kove's *Hocus Pocus*, *Alfie Atkins*; Mathias Malzieu and Stephane Berla's *Jack and the Cuckoo-Clock Heart*; Alessandro Rak's *The Art of Happiness*; Thomas Szabo and Helene Giraud's *Minuscule: Valley of the Lost Ants*; and Rasmus A. Silversten's *Solan & Ludvig's Christmas*. Keep an eye out for more in-depth articles about these eclectic films in the months ahead.

Of course, our cover story this month is DreamWorks Animation's reboot of the popular Jay Ward TV cartoon *Mr. Peabody & Sherman*. Our writer Michael Mallory had the chance to chat with the film's director, Rob Minkoff (*The Lion King*, *Stuart Little*) to find out how the team at the studio brought these beloved toon characters to stereoscopic 3-D and redesigned Ward's charming universe for today's modern audiences. Also featured in this mid-winter issue is a look at the new Warner Bros.' release, *The LEGO Movie*, which is directed by the killer team of Phil Lord and Chris Miller, the duo behind the first *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* movie and the cult TV show *Clone High*.

This is also our final award-season preview issue – that's why you get a special animation and vfx-related ballot on Page 26. You can play along at home and see how many of your favorite categories you can predict in advance of the big night. After all, everyone at your Oscar party can come up with the Best Picture shoo-ins, but you will be able to impress them all with your knowledge of the Animated Short category, right? (Check out our interview with *Possessions* director Shuhei Morita on Page 24.)

Who knew February was a big month of unveiling new animated content on TV? Face it, these days, you can find exciting new shows debuting on the small screen on any given day or month. That's why we had to make sure we give you the scoop on several new TV offerings, so you can learn all about Cartoon Network's multimedia launch of *Mixels*, Nickelodeon's debut of *Breadwinners* and Nick Jr.'s premiere of *Wallykazam!* in this issue.

Finally, on a personal note, I wanted to thank all of you readers and members of the animation and vfx communities for your support throughout the years. As I embark on a new venture, I wanted to let you know what an honor and privilege it has been to cover the work of all you talented men and women of the animation and vfx universes. I am constantly in awe of all your brilliance, creativity and never-ending passion for the art and craft of animation.

I felt truly blessed to be writing about this world for over a decade. I couldn't have dreamed about a better job or more fascinating subjects to cover. Thank you for being so supportive of *Animation Magazine* through the years. I'm also thrilled to announce that my talented colleague Thomas J. McLean has come on board as the new editor and our awesome associate editor, Mercedes Milligan, will continue to fight the good fight on behalf of animators worldwide. I also want to thank our president and publisher, Jean Thoren, for giving me the chance to be the editor of this publication, as well as the rest of our talented *Animag* team – Susanne Rector, Sheri Shelton, Steve Dietrich, Jan Bayouth and Jordan Koch – for their kindness, hard work and constant support.

Stay animated, and remember the words of Pinocchio's best pal, Jiminy: "It wouldn't hurt to take your orders from your grasshopper – er, your conscience, if you have one!"



Ramin

Ramin Zahed
Editor-in-Chief
rzahed@animationmagazine.net

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"I still can't believe it – especially just being nominated along with *The Wind Rises*. Miyazaki is one of the directors who made me want to do animation. I don't know if I will be able to meet him at the Oscars, but I think that would be the greatest thing."

– *Ernest & Celestine* director Benjamin Renner



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Info@animationmagazine.net

President/Publisher Jean Thoren

Accounting Jan Bayouth

EDITORIAL

Edit@animationmagazine.net

Editor Thomas J. McLean

Editor-in-Chief Ramin Zahed

Associate Editor Mercedes Milligan

Webmaster Steven Dietrich

Digital Reviews Editor Todd Sheridan Perry

Contributors

Mike De Seve, Lisa Goldman, Michael Mallory, Thomas J. McLean, Ellen Wolff

ADVERTISING SALES

Sales@animationmagazine.net

Sheri Shelton

Director of Business Development

CLim@animationmagazine.net

Claire-Dee Lim

CREATIVE

Prod@animationmagazine.net

Art Director/Production Manager

Susanne Rector

CIRCULATION

Circ@animationmagazine.net

Circulation Director Jan Bayouth

TO ADVERTISE:

Phone: 818-883-2884

Fax: 818-883-3773

Email: Sales@animationmagazine.net

Website: www.animationmagazine.net

List Rental

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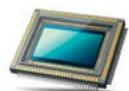
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March Planner

2 It's **Oscar Sunday**, which means we're going to find out which of the five nominated animated movies (*The Croods*, *Despicable Me 2*, *Ernest & Celestine*, *Frozen* and *The*

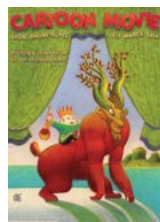
Wind Rises) and shorts are going to take home the big prize. It's also the birthday of **Theodor Geisel** (Dr. Seuss)!



4 Get your new DVD animation kicks today with **Teen Titans Go: Mission to Misbehave** and **My Little Pony Friendship Is Magic: Season Three**. And let's not forget the sci-fi thrills of **Doctor Who: The Time of the Doctor**.



5-7 **Cartoon Movie** spotlights 59 new Euro animated titles in Lyon, France. Meanwhile, in New York City, GKIDS hosts the **N.Y. Int'l Children's Festival** through March 30.



7 Get ready to travel through time with the Rob Minkoff-directed animated feature **Mr. Peabody & Sherman** today. Also opening today, Noam Murro's epic **300: Rise of an Empire**.



11 Lots of familiar animated characters revisit the DVD scene today, as new arrivals include **Barbie: The Pearl Princess**, **The Flintstone Kids: Rockin' in Bedrock** and **Monsters vs. Aliens: Supersonic Joyride**.



12-14 **FICCI-Frames** brings animation and digital entertainment professionals to Mumbai, India, this week. (ficci-frames.com)



17-21 It's time to jump on that flight to San Francisco for the annual **Game Developers Conference**, held at the Moscone Center. (gdconf.com)



18 You can catch this year's Oscar frontrunner, Disney's **Frozen**, on DVD and Blu-ray today. Also available for home viewing are **The Jungle Book 2**, **Doc McStuffins: Mobile Clinic** and **Pac-Man and the Ghostly Adventures: Ghost Patrol**.



21 Kermit, Miss Piggy and the rest of the lovable gang are back on the big screen in **Muppets Most Wanted**, which stars the likes of Ricky Gervais, Christoph Waltz, Tina Fey and Ty Burrell. The pic will open against the adaptation of young adult dystopian bestseller **Divergent**.



24 **Ub Iwerks** and **Joe Barbera** both were born on this day.



25 Spring is here, so you can celebrate with a nice animated DVD release: **The Chipmunk Adventure: Special Edition**, **Winx Club: Season 1**, **Monster High: Frights, Camera, Action** or **Yu-Gi-Oh Classic: Season 4**.



28 Watch Russell Crowe chew out the digital scenery and lots of scared animals in Darren Aronofsky's Biblical epic **Noah**, which costars Emma Watson and Jennifer Connelly, and opens in theaters today.

28-30 Get ready for the

Emerald City Comicon in Seattle. This year's guests will include Stephen Amell, Richard Dean Anderson, Michael Biehn, John de Lancie, Michael Dorn, Eliza Dushku, Cary Elwes, Kelly Hu, Nichelle Nichols and Alan Tudyk, to name a few. (emeraldcitycomicon.com)



To get your company's events and products listed in this monthly calendar, please e-mail mercedes@animationmagazine.net.

THE ANIMATED MUSICAL EVENT OF A GENERATION

"For the first time in forever, it looks like there's an animated musical phenomenon! "Let It Go" is the film's undeniable showstopper."

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WINNER

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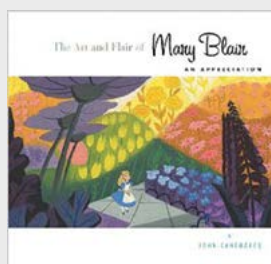
Books We Love



The Art and Flair of Mary Blair: An Appreciation (Updated Edition)

By John Canemaker and Mary Blair
[Disney Editions, \$45, available May]

You'll find few animators and artists who are not in awe of talented Disney artist and illustrator Mary Blair, who was behind the look of *Cinderella*, *Peter Pan* and *Alice in Wonderland*, as well as the "It's a Small World" attraction for the 1964 World Fair and several classic children's Golden Books. This spring, die-hard Blair fans will make the trek to San Francisco's Walt Disney Family Museum for a top-notch exhibit of her work, curated by this book's author and Oscar-winning animator and teacher John Canemaker. This biography traces Blair's work from her early watercolors through her advertising and card designs and her work for the studio, and includes painstakingly reproduced art from her career. Of course, seeing the artwork at the exhibit is hugely recommended, but buying the new reissue of the book is the next best thing to being there!



Disney's The Archive Series - Walt Disney's Nine Old Men: The Flipbooks

By Pete Docter
[Disney Editions, \$60]

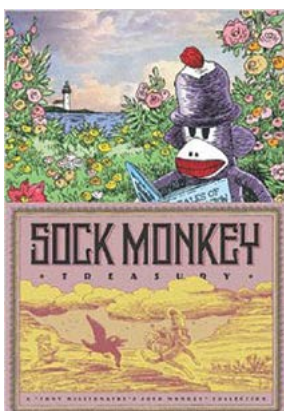
This fantastic collector's dream was released last year, but nobody sent us a copy to review here at the magazine, so I finally found it at the local bookstore and bought one for myself. Seriously, how can you say no to this superb box, which includes nine small-format (6.3-inch by 6.8-inch) hardcovers devoted to drawings by Walt Disney's original animators – Les Clark, Eric Larson, Frank Thomas, John Lounsbery, Ward Kimball, Ollie Johnston, Mark Davis, Wolfgang Reitherman and Milt Kahl? Each book brings to life an animated sequence from our favorite pics, (*Alice in Wonderland*, *Dumbo*, *Fantasia*, *Peter Pan*, *Bambi*, *Lady and the Tramp*, *101 Dalmatians* and *Pinocchio*) and includes a brief introduction about one of the Nine Old Men, penned by contemporary artists such as Glen Keane, Andreas Deja and Ron Clements. This is the one we'd pick for the really, really special person with whom you want to spend Valentine's Day!



Sock Monkey Treasury

By Tony Millionaire
[Fantagraphics, \$39.99]

Late-night animation followers may know Tony Millionaire (ne Scott Richardson) as the man behind the short-lived Adult Swim series *The Drinky Crow Show*, but comics aficionados have been swooning for years over his clever *Maakies* and *Sock Monkey* comics and picture books. This month, Fantagraphics has put out an awesome hardcover collection, which includes all 12 issues of the Eisner Award-winning comic book, which was originally published by Dark Horse Comics from 1998 to 2007, as well as the graphic novella *Uncle Gabby* (2004) and the illustrated storybook *The Glass Doorknob* (2002). We're sure you're going to trip over the original Uncle Gabby and Mr. Crow's adventures, which include finding a home for a shrunken head, playing matchmakers between a mouse and a bat, hunting salamanders and, yes, even trying to get to heaven! As a bonus, Fantagraphics has also thrown in the full-length *Sock Monkey* graphic novel *The Inches Incident*, in which an adorable plaything starts acting like a Chuckie doll! Aaah, sublime madness, indeed.



Peanuts Every Sunday

By Charles M. Schulz
[Fantagraphics, \$50]

We know Christmas was a couple of months ago, but the helpful elves at Fantagraphics never stop doing superior work. They recently began a massive project, a 10-volume series featuring color reproductions of the Sunday editions of Charles M. Schulz's



Peanuts The first volume in this venture serves up a fantastic collection of the strip from 1952 through 1955, recoloring them to match the original hues and to avoid sharp syndication colors. You'll find very young versions of the gang and Snoopy in this edition, and it's quite fun to trace the origins of the more sophisticated characters we're more familiar with from later years and the animated specials. There are some curmudgeons online who are complaining about the book's unconventional size (13.2 inches x 9.3 inches), because it doesn't fit nicely with the rest of the art books on their shelves. But come on! The whole reason to have this volume is to relive the joy of reading the Sunday morning funnies – and that's why the larger format is absolutely vital to the experience. Keep 'em coming, folks!

– by Ramin Zahed

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The Past Ain't What It Used to Be!

How Rob Minkoff and his team at DreamWorks assembled a shiny, new version of Jay Ward's classic cartoon time travelers *Mr. Peabody & Sherman*. by Michael Mallory

Recreating the past can be a tricky proposition, particularly if the past involves a beloved boomer television show like *Rocky and His Friends*. Fortunately, the team behind DreamWorks' *Mr. Peabody & Sherman* were not looking to replicate Jay Ward's classic *Peabody's Improbable History*, about an urbane, canine brainiac and his "pet" boy who travel in time and discover the truth about history's most famous personages, so much as use it as the basis for a new and expanded story. While the original characters are essentially a comedic non sequitur, director Rob Minkoff (*The Lion King*; *Stuart Little*) saw an opportunity for greater depth.

"It's really the relationship between the two characters," says Minkoff, who began talking about a *Mr. Peabody & Sherman* feature in 2002. "I really loved the shorts growing up and always had a fond place in my heart for them, they're a classic comedy pair, but obviously it was important for us to go beyond the original series."

In *Mr. Peabody & Sherman*, we witness the genesis of the team, as baby Sherman is legally adopted by Mr. Peabody (voiced by Ty Burrell), whose modernist Manhattan apartment contains a time

machine, the WABAC. Trouble begins when Sherman starts public school and has to deal with the other kids, particularly a young girl named Penny, to whom Sherman impulsively shows the WABAC.

What starts as a joyride through history ultimately threatens to shred the fabric of time itself. Penny, Minkoff says, "was created to try and get under the skin a little bit of the relationship between Peabody and Sherman, and what might happen to see it evolve."

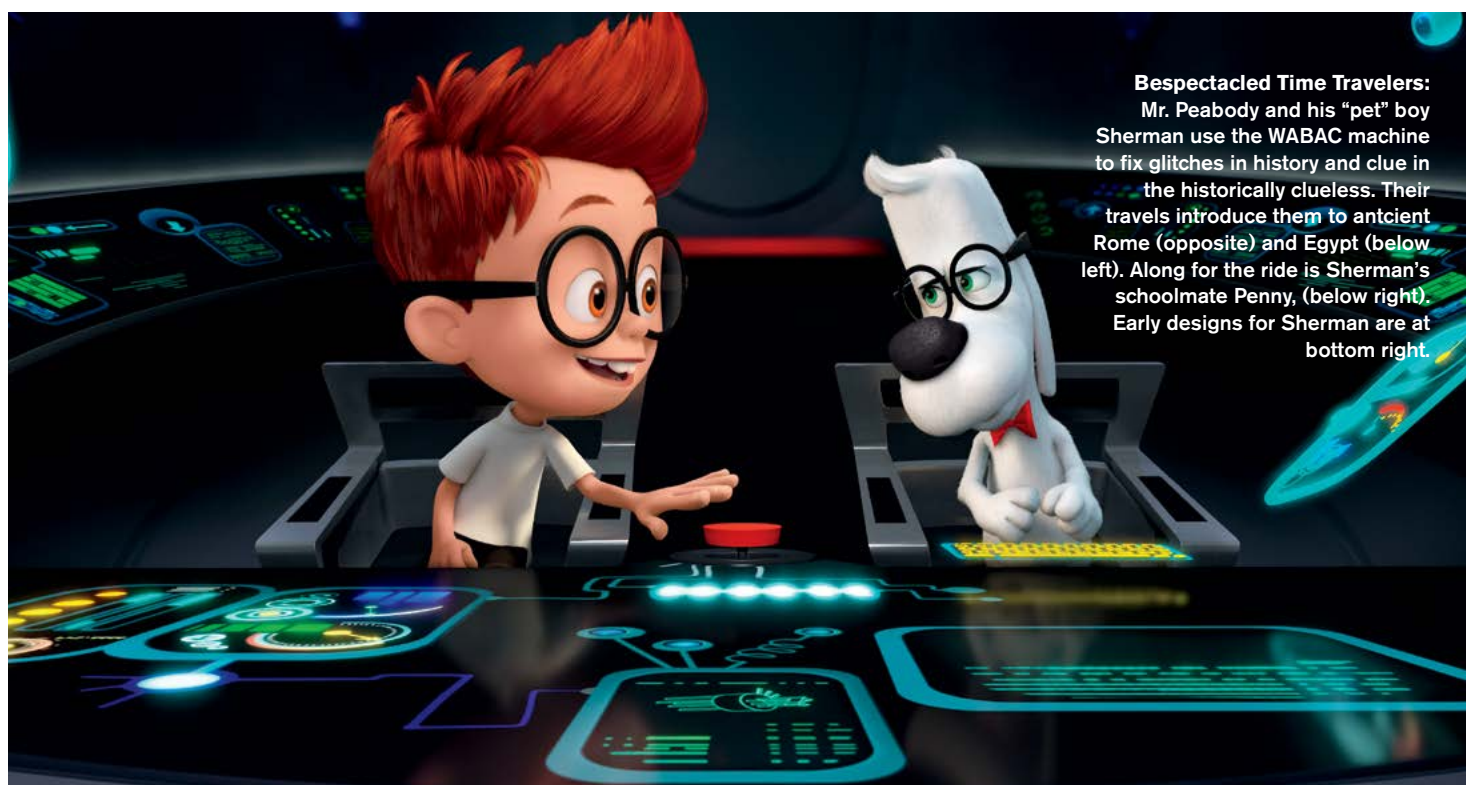


Of course, the central gag of the original was that most of history's iconic figures couldn't have found the exit in an open field without a map, and required the help of Mr. Peabody to fulfill their legacies. Here the likes of Leonardo, Mona Lisa and Agamemnon may be a bit more aware and the emphasis, at least visually, is on the historical backdrops. These include ancient Egypt, Troy, the Renaissance and the French Revolution, with brief stops in the ice age, Elizabethan England and Kitty Hawk, N.C. "The idea was for each time period to have a very unique look, and also for the time periods to have some relationship to how they exist in the popular imagination," says production designer David James. "In da Vinci's Renaissance Italy, the color palletes are lifted directly from Renaissance art."

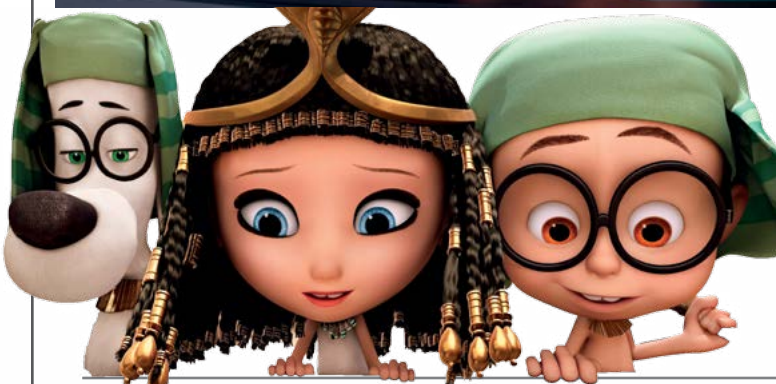
"It's really about the relationship between the two characters ... I really loved the shorts growing up and always had a fond place in my heart for them. They're a classic comedy pair, but obviously it was important for us to go beyond the original series."

— Director Rob Minkoff





Bespectacled Time Travelers: Mr. Peabody and his “pet” boy Sherman use the WABAC machine to fix glitches in history and clue in the historically clueless. Their travels introduce them to ancient Rome (opposite) and Egypt (below left). Along for the ride is Sherman’s schoolmate Penny, (below right). Early designs for Sherman are at bottom right.



“Jay Ward’s daughter, Tiffany, who grew up with these characters as part of her childhood [and who co-executive produced the film], approved all of the designs and said of Mr. Peabody’s apartment, ‘Jay would have lived in that place himself.’”

—Production designer David James



Walk Cycle Like an Egyptian

The same doesn’t hold as true for the film’s ancient Egypt sequences. “I started working at DreamWorks while we were making *The Prince of Egypt*,” James says, “and there was an absolute mandate not to put Easter Eggs in the film, especially not in the Egyptian hieroglyphs. But one made it in, a Kareem Abdul-Jabbar hieroglyph, and he’s doing a sky hook. I reminded Jeffrey [Katzenberg] of this and said, ‘Just so you know, every hieroglyph in [*Mr. Peabody*] is going to be a Sergio Aragones-type marginalia joke.’ Sharp eyes may also spot a traditional animation desk in Leonardo’s attic, since, as James

notes, “We figured da Vinci would be a 2D guy.” Other visual “Easter eggs” to hunt for include portraits of Rocky and Bullwinkle and Jay Ward himself.

Even the settings for the film’s present-day scenes are slightly retro. “We wanted to create the contemporary world of Manhattan to be kind of mid-century so it would evoke memories of the original period the show was on television,” says Minkoff. For his part, James describes Peabody’s aerial Playboy Moderne pad as “the Farnsworth House meets Fallingwater meets the Seagram’s Building.” He adds, “Jay Ward’s daughter, Tiffany, who grew up with these char-

acters as part of her childhood [and who co-executive produced the film], approved all of the designs and said of Mr. Peabody’s apartment, ‘Jay would have lived in that place himself.’”

Regarding another hallmark of all Ward productions, their sterling voice casts, Minkoff states he was not interested in imitations. “We thought we could try to do a voice replicating Bill Scott [as Peabody], but I have to say I’m always a little disappointed [with imitations],” he says. “In the original show, a lot of times the historical figures spoke with a Brooklyn accent, no matter where they were from. We actually tried that but found that we missed something of the character of the places we were going.”

One of the first decisions the director made was to ensure that the voice of Sherman was



provided by a real child actor – in this case, 10-year-old Max Charles – rather than an adult like Walter Tetley who, despite his prepubescent voice, was in his mid-40s while playing the role in the original. (And, while June Foray, the last remaining member of the Jay Ward stock company, is not in the film, she voices her signature creation, Rocky the Flying Squirrel, in a new short screening with *Mr. Peabody & Sherman*).

Unlike a lot of current 3-D animated films, *Mr. Peabody & Sherman* does not present highly stylized characters in photorealistic surroundings. "It's an animated film, after all," James says, "and the whole point is to take artistic license. We paid a lot of attention to this. The wood textures, for instance – and brick, and the patterning on cobblestones or even fabric – has a cartoon nature to it. We are keenly aware that we are starting with very beloved and very simple source material."

Given the enormous range of possibilities of historical eras to choose from and send up (which bodes well for potential sequels), the final selections were chosen because they convey something about the Peabody and Sherman relationship, Minkoff says. One, however, did not make it in the final cut. "We did have a sequence in ancient Rome with Caligula," Minkoff says. "We went from Caligula to Nero in the same scene, but we thought the Caligula plot was taking it a little too far. For a variety of reasons, we ultimately decided not to go to Ancient Rome, but to Troy instead."

Jay Ward's *Caligula*? The mind boggles.

Fox will release DreamWorks Animation's *Mr. Peabody & Sherman* in theaters on March 7.

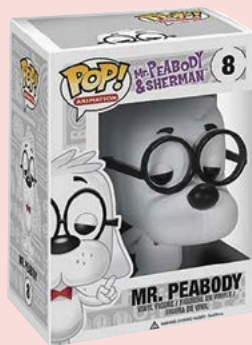
Michael Mallory is an award-winning author whose bibliography includes *Universal Studios' Monsters*, *X-Men: The Characters and Their Universe*, *Marvel and Hanna-Barbera Cartoons*.

Time Traveling Tools

Before you see the new DreamWorks feature based on Jay Ward's *Peabody's Improbable History* segments that were part of the *Rocky and Bullwinkle* series from the late 1950s and early 1960s, you can beef up on the originals on DVD or Blu-ray, and some books. Here are some suggestions for your Wardian catchup course:

The Art of Jay Ward Productions

by Darrell Van Citters. This well-researched and beautifully produced book offers more than 1,000 images and pieces of behind-the-scenes artwork from Ward's animated series. It also profiles the contributions of the designers, writers and directors at the studio. (Oxberry Press, \$35.65)



The Art of Mr. Peabody & Sherman by Jerry Beck. A fascinating look at the making of Rob Minkoff's new movie, which provides interviews with the producers, art director and production designer and offers a nice selection of development art. It includes a preface by producer Tiffany Ward and a foreword by Ty Burrell, who voices Mr. Peabody in the new movie. (Insight Editions, \$45)



Mr. Peabody and Sherman Big Golden Book by Erica David, illustrated by Fabio Laguna and Patrick Spaziante. Yes, we know these lovely Golden Books are designed for younger readers, but how can you resist the spot-on illustrations by



Laguna and Spaziante, who are pros at delivering kid-friendly 2D images based on CG movies? (Golden Books, \$8.99)

The Best of Mr. Peabody and Sherman, Vol. 1. You can truly lose yourself in the magnificent madness of the

original 2D cartoons about the brilliant, time-traveling dog and his adopted son, which ran as part of the *Rocky and Bullwinkle & Friends* series from 1959 to 1964. The duo visits the likes of Columbus, Shakespeare, Magellan, Beethoven, Calamity Jane, Lawrence of Arabia and Florence Nightingale in this two-volume DVD collection. (The DVD was released

in 2012 and covers the first four seasons.) (Classic Media, \$9.95; Amazon Prime: \$1.99 per episode)



Mr. Peabody & Sherman Funko Toys. And of course, you need a couple of cutting-edge Funko Pop Vinyl versions of

the brilliant dog and his bespectacled son, right? Thanks to the new movie release, you won't have to travel back in time to the early 1960s to be the proud owner of these cool collectibles. (Funko, \$9.99 each)



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Minifigs Meet the Big Screen

How directors Phil Lord and Chris Miller teamed up with Aussie studio Animal Logic to construct *The LEGO Movie*. by Mercedes Milligan

Remember back in the dismal days of 1980s animation, when many cartoons were little more than hastily slapped together 20-minute toy commercials? It seems like

lately the trend has been flipped on its head, as one after another blockbuster spectacle based on familiar brands hits theaters. But as an antidote to all the smashing, crashing and exploding of *Transformers* or *Bat-leship*, this month offers something a little different as Warner Bros. releases the creative, colorful and comedy-packed *The LEGO Movie*.

Written and directed by Phil Lord and Chris Miller (*Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*, *21 Jump Street*), the film centers on an unremarkable minifigure (those little plastic dudes with the snap-on heads) named Emmet who is mistaken for a prophesied hero and ends up drafted into a fellowship of oddball strangers on a quest to defeat an evil tyrant. The directors worked with writing partners Dan and Kevin Hageman to come up

with an adventurous story that would allow their reluctant plastic hero to visit a variety of LEGO-inspired worlds.

The CG-animated epic features the voices of

terious Batman, Nick Offerman as vengeful pirate Metal Beard, Alison Brie as the lovable Unikitty and Charlie Day as Benny, the 1980-something Spaceman.



"When we started the project, they didn't think we could get any emotion or get audiences to care about these little brick characters. They thought that was crazy ... You don't need to make animation any more complicated. You can do a stripped down thing – raw, pure and visceral."

– Animation director Chris McKay



Chris Pratt as Emmet, Will Ferrell as the scheming control freak President Business, Liam Neeson as henchman Good Cop/Bad Cop, Morgan Freeman as the mystic Vitruvius, Elizabeth Banks as tough-as-nails Wyldstyle, Will Arnett as the mys-

it doesn't have to make sense, because people already like the brand," says co-director Lord. "But that wasn't the kind of movie we wanted to make. We wanted to take this brand and find meaning in it. Our goal was to find a bigger story, otherwise

"We were inspired by the inventive, clever and adorable fan-made stop-motion films LEGO fans were making and putting on the Internet," says Miller, who admits he was "obsessed" with LEGO's Classic Space line as a kid. "We thought it would be awesome to make something which had the same spirit – but on a much larger scale with a larger budget, of course. That was part of what we insisted on doing from the get-to."

"I think it's really easy to dismiss a project that obviously has a big commercial tie-in. You can just tell a few jokes and

Playing Nice with Others: Brand-new minifigs like hero Emmet and villain President Business (below) appear with favorites like Batman.



for the film's de- and reconstruction sequences.

"We worked with incredible sensitivity to make the CG feel like it was step-by-step, stop-motion animation," says McKay, who also served as co-editor and head of story on the film. "Our team really delved deep into observing the little mistakes and idiosyncrasies of stop-motion animation." Best known for his work on hit stop-motion TV series *Robot Chicken* and *Moral Orel*, McKay was the ideal person to guide the design, lighting and animation teams toward a hand-crafted feel.

In fact, the crew got so into the idea of using LEGO pieces to create everything in this unique universe that even effects elements like smoke, water, rock formations and fire are made up of them. "One of the special stylistic touches we added to the movie was that we stayed away from motion blur," says Miller. "We developed a way to create the blur made up of LEGO bricks which were the same color as the characters' bodies. We'd allow those bricks to be on the screen for a few seconds [to create the effect]."

Emmet's unwelcome quest takes him and his company of adventurers across many different landscapes made up of these peculiar pieces. The directors say that each quirky location was inspired by classic movies—an oater-influenced Western town, a castle reminiscent of *Lord of the Rings*, the no-rules wonderland of Cloud Cuckoo Land that takes cues from *Yellow Submarine*. And many of the film's designs and characters were taken from well-known LEGO products.

"[Phil Lord and I] come from a 2D animation background.

We wanted to prove that we could get real subtlety of emotion, the seven points of articulation, and our animation director Chris McKay and his team really got an amazing range of emotion out of these very simple designs."

– Director/writer Chris Miller



it wouldn't hold up. We had to have a movie that was compelling and had a real story to tell."

The project was created under near-concurrent production at three locations. Lord and Miller were chiefly kept in Los Angeles, where the film's concept, story, characters and design scheme took shape. After initial work with the story and animatic, animation director Chris McKay relocated from Santa Monica to Australia for the animation production at Animal Logic. And at LEGO headquarters in Denmark, top designers under the direction of design VP Matthew Ashton (also an exec producer on the film) used their hands-on construction know-how to come up with realistic, functional designs for the characters, vehicles and props dreamed up by the filmmakers. (Hey, *you* try building a pirate ship that turns into a submarine made of little plastic chunks on your own!)

If You Build It...

To carry over the hand-crafted look of stop-motion shorts, the filmmakers opted to digitally create millions of LEGO bricks modeled on real-world pieces which were used to construct everything in the film's world. "We broke one of

the cardinal rules of our CG animation world. We never liked things to look photo-real—that's what we especially avoided in *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*," says Lord. "We wanted our characters to look exactly like LEGO bricks. The lighting was also super-duper realistic. We were going for the cleverness of represented objects." The final tally was 3,863,484 unique bricks, reused and recombined so that the film required more than 15 million in all – that's in addition to 183 unique minifigures, some of them classic LEGO characters and some brand new.

By building each scene *literally* brick-by-brick, the filmmakers were able to tweak things like surface damage (scuff marks, fingerprints) and irregularity in how the bricks were put together to create a more lifelike look. A lot of R&D time and lighting designers' headaches went into balancing the shiny plastic quality of LEGO bricks with realistic wear and tear. Since a key part of the film's story are the Master Builders – minifigures with the power (and creativity) to disassemble structures and reuse the pieces to create something new – using individually modeled components rather than flat backgrounds was invaluable

Meet the Minifigs

One of the big challenges for the animation department was how to keep the flat, printed-on look of minifigures' faces while allowing for the range of emotion and personality needed to connect an audience with a character. In fact, until the studio honchos saw the original test animatic, they were not convinced CG was the way to go.

"When we started the project, they didn't think we could get any emotion or get audiences to care about these little brick characters," McKay says. "They thought that was crazy. But we were able to show them a test, show them you could empathize with this guy. You don't need to make animation any more complicated. You can do a stripped down thing—raw, pure and visceral!" McKay encouraged his animators to act out as the characters to really dig in to the emotions needed, which were then assembled from a massive library of eyes, brows and mouths for the diverse characters.

Other limitations of the characters add to the film's handmade aesthetic, despite using high-end proprietary CG solutions at Animal Logic. The filmmakers wanted to avoid making the minifigures move in ways they can not in real life, so characters sometimes walk, sometimes hop and

sometimes seem to have been picked up by an invisible hand and propelled forward.

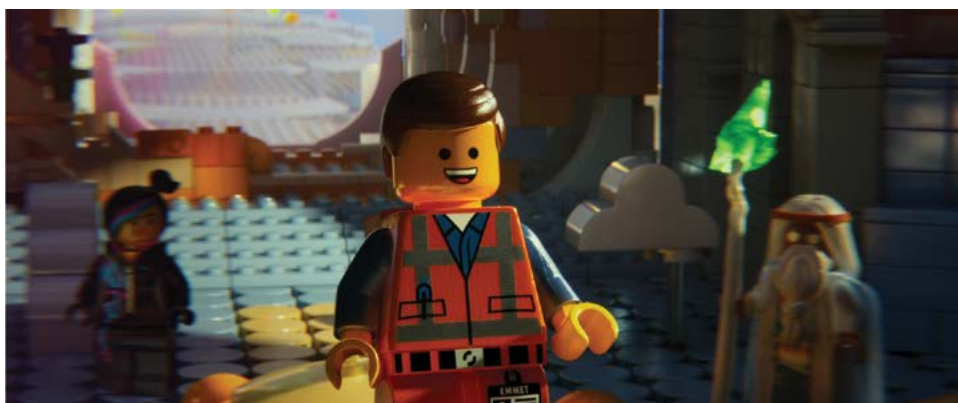
"Our animators were super nerdy about making it feel like stop motion," says McKay. The crew even made a point of not using any CG rigging cheats – only the kinds of tricks you would use on a stop-motion set. "When I want a character to scratch their eye, there are things that you can do—break the arm off, puppet the arm. We did all kinds of little cheats, the things you do on set. If you slow the movie down frame by frame, you can see when we pull a leg off a character he hits the ground and we anticipate the leg hitting the ground, we release on the way down and the body goes ahead of the leg. When it's up to speed, it looks like squash-and-stretch and ricochets."

In addition to the challenges of creating engaging expressions and figuring out how to move both the minifigs and brick-built characters like Unikitty and Metal Beard (who, after a vicious battle with President Business, has been forced to replace most of his body parts with a Swiss Army Knife-like collection of tools and bits), the team also had to find ways to bring the gritty, real-world feel of the rest of the LEGO world to the characters. Benny the Spaceman, who along with Batman is based on a real LEGO figure, had a special place in the directors' hearts.

As a favorite from their 1980s childhoods, they wanted Benny to look well worn by time and trial, so the designers and CG team gave him a broken helmet and a plastic body riddled

"We broke one of the cardinal rules of our CG animation world. We never liked things to look photo-real ... We wanted our characters to look exactly like LEGO bricks. The lighting was also super-duper realistic. We were going for the cleverness of represented objects."

– Director/writer Phil Lord



with teeth marks, scratches and dust.

One Brick at a Time

On top of the digital wizardry and the delicate balancing act needed to create a stunning, modern CG epic that felt like something a very determined kid could shoot frame-by-frame in his basement, the principals note that the biggest challenge was finding their way to a story that would entice audiences and take full advantage of the possibilities of a LEGO-built world.

"The toughest part was finding a clear, emotional story that would track all the way through," Miller says. "It had to be funny and fun and full of imagination. Our teams in Sydney and Los Angeles and even the LEGO studios in Denmark worked very well together to deliver the movie. We did the animatic and, if we found out that the story didn't work, we just tore it down and built

everything all over again. We did double time and nobody ever slept!"

The collateral damage of sleep withdrawal and severe caffeine addictions aside, the team thinks they found just the right combination of building blocks to create something truly original out of a well-known brand.

"We're really happy that, although it goes

to so many different worlds, the movie holds together and actually keeps you really involved with the characters' journeys," says Lord. "We broke so many rules and were still able to tell a story that kids can relate to. It also has a bit of a message about creativity, innovation and ingenuity – things that you can probably write a college paper about!"

"I am really psyched about this movie because we wanted to make this movie to feel like the way kids play," adds McKay. "When they play, they lose themselves in these serious and epic worlds, as absurd as it all seems. Imagine [*The LEGO Movie*] is what Henry Selick and Michael Bay would make if they got together and decided to do a big movie together!"

Warner Bros. released *The LEGO Movie* nationwide on February 7.

The New Old-School: Designers used digital models of real LEGO pieces to construct every element of the film's worlds, including effects.



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The screening will be followed by a Q&A
with directors Max Lang and Jan Lachauer

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A Handy Tale

Marc du Pontavice and his team at Xilam prepare a new animated feature titled *I Lost My Body*. by Ramin Zahed



How do you follow up the madcap antics of *Oggy and the Cockroaches*? If you're acclaimed French producer Marc du Pontavice, you tell the twisted tale of an amputated hand that goes on a quest to reunite with its body (which incidentally belongs to a young lovestruck Moroccan immigrant)!

Based on Guillaume Laurant's novel *Happy Hand*, the fantasy-filled movie will be directed by Jérémy Clapin, who is best known for acclaimed shorts such as *Skhizein* (2008) and *Palmipedarium* (2012). French cinema fans may recognize Laurant as a frequent Jean-Pierre Jeunet collaborator, who penned the scripts for *Amelie*, *A Very Long Engagement* and *The Young and Prodigious T.S. Spivet*.

"As I was working on a live-action film with the highly regarded French screenwriter, Guillaume Laurent, he mentioned a novel he had written called *Happy Hand*," recalls the accomplished producer. "As soon as I read the book, I fell in love with the idea of making a hand the hero of an animated film."

Du Pontavice says he loved the fact that the book completely reverses the concept of the brain driving each part of the body. "In animation, you've often seen a character suddenly driven by a part of its body. But it was mainly a comedic conceit. Here it is what drives the story and each piece of the body has its own consciousness. Moreover, Rosalie (that's the name of the hand) strongly believes that she has a fate, and being reunited with her body will fulfill her destiny."

Described as a grown-up tale,

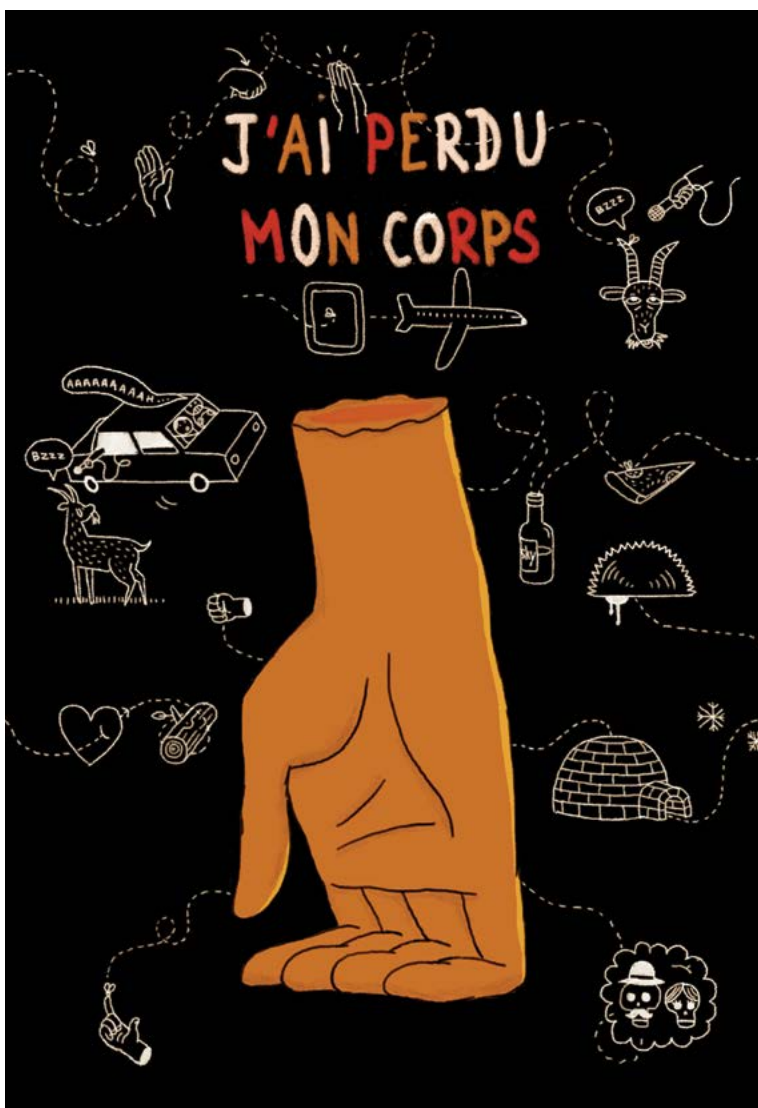
which is simultaneously epic, romantic, absurd and poetic, the movie has an estimated budget of a little under \$10 million. The plans are to mix CG animation with hand-drawn renderings, as well as rotoscopic tools for reference to animate the human characters. "It will be a challenge for the animators as we will have to build character into a hand, something that has neither eyes nor a mouth," du Pontavice says. "Secondly, the story will be partially told from the POV of Rosalie, the hand. And that

will be fun to storyboard."

Du Pontavice, who founded the Xilam production company in 1990 (originally named Gaumont Multimedia), has been a fixture of the global animation scene in both the small-screen and features arenas. With studios in both France and Vietnam, the company employs about 250 artists. Among the shop's many TV hits over the years are *The New Adventures of Lucky Luke*, *Oggy and the Cockroaches*, *Rantanplan*, *Shuriken School*, *Zig and Sharko* and *The Daltons*. Xilam has been a driving force in the feature animation scene as well, with releases such as *Kaena: The Prophecy*, *Stupid Invaders*, *Lucky Luke: Go West* and *Oggy and the Cockroaches: The Movie*, which is showcased at the Cartoon Movie event in France in March.

"It's quite exciting for us to do both TV series and movies," says du Pontavice. "We're not hiring different artists, as we believe that our talents can be strong in both worlds. About 80 percent of our artists have worked on both TV and feature productions at our studio."

The producer, who is a big fan of Hayao Miyazaki's recent feature *The Wind Rises* and Craig McCracken's animated TV series *Wander Over Yonder*, believes that family entertainment is stronger than ever in his home country. However, he also acknowledges that it's more difficult than ever to produce animated features that are not made for family audiences, even in France.



Xilam's *I Lost My Body* (*J'ai perdu mon corps*) is aiming for a summer 2016 release date. For more info, visit www.xilam.com.

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A Rabbit's Journey to a Mystical Realm

The new Danish-Swedish CG-animated movie, *Beyond Beyond*, mixes beautiful 3-D images with an unusual subject matter. by Ramin Zahed

In 2011, Danish director Esben Toft Jacobsen made a splash on the international animation scene with his first feature, *The Great Bear*. He is once again in the spotlight this year with the new feature *Beyond Beyond*, which will be showcased at the Berlin Film Festival's Generation Kplus section in February and at Cartoon Movie in France in March.

Described as "a story about wanting the impossible," *Beyond Beyond* – billed as the first stereoscopic 3-D film produced in Sweden – follows the adventures of a little rabbit called Johan, who sets out on an incredible and quite mystical journey. One day, when his father leaves their boat for provisions, Johan receives a distress call on the radio that reveals a clue about his missing mother's whereabouts. And thus begins his voyage to the Kingdom of the Feather King.

As Jacobsen tells us via email interview, he and scriptwriter Jannik Tai Mosholt decided to brainstorm and come up with ideas about their next venture. "I had drawn a rabbit kid and his dad, and the story grew out of that drawing. They were having a great time in the picture, but you automatically asked yourself where the mother was. It was also very clear who Johan, the main character, was, already from the first simple sketches. He is a strong character and he made the story very joyful to work with."

The director, who counts Yuri Norstein, Tove Jansson, Astrid Lindgren, Hayao Miyazaki, David O'Reilly, Martin De Thurah, Brad Bird and Neil Gaiman among his sources of inspiration, says working with a small team was one of the main challenges of this latest film. "Small teams are great, because I got to know everyone and everyone felt personally invested in the movie," he says. "The challenge in working on a small scale is that almost everything has to be right the first time. There is very little room for changes. At the same time, we kept working on the story very far into production. The team was great about adapting to changes and unknown challenges, but the planning was tough."

Jacobsen also used animal characters in his short projects, such as *Having a Brother*. He says he especially enjoys drawing animals that are fragile, energetic and appealing at the same time. "When I made the first drawing of Johan and his dad, I knew rabbits were the right choice," he says. "Animals are great to work with. If you do humans, you spend so much energy on getting the design and animation not to look weird. Animals give you much more freedom. You end up spending your time more on the fun parts. If you have a scene with



Little rabbit Johan searches for his mother in the land of the Feather King.



Esben Toft Jacobsen



Petter Lindblad

a human who goes to the dentist, you are pretty locked, but if you create a scene with a lion that goes to the dentist, it is a lot more fun to work with."

The film's producer, Petter Lindblad, who also worked on Jacobsen's *The Great Bear*, says: "We're telling a story about a subject that can be difficult for children to deal with and is not often brought up, and that's missing someone that they can no longer be together with. In our film, our main character, Johan, misses his mother, and we can all relate to the emotion of missing someone close, like a grandparent who is not with us any more, divorced parents not living close enough to visit, etc."

Lindblad says the goal was to create an adventure/drama that used humor in a subtle and original way. "It's not the usual funny-ha-ha approach we see in other films for children," he says. "For me, it feels like we're telling a story for children more on their premises, in a serious but exciting, fun and joyous way."

According to the producer, *Beyond Beyond* took about three years to make, from the presentation of the first idea from the director and the writer to final de-

livery. He says the film, which was made for about 2.7 million euros (about \$3.7 million), has been the speediest feature-film production of his career. "They were able to hit the right tone and ambition with this project from day one, and that made it an ideal work experience," Lindblad says.

The CG animation was produced in Maya. The pipeline also included Nuke 7 for compositing, V-Ray 2.0 and Royal Render for rendering. The film's visual effects were created using Maya, Real-Flow and Phoenix FD.

It's appropriate that the much-anticipated film is one of Cartoon Movie's key premieres at this year's event, as the financing for the film project was aided by the annual European meetup. As the producer explains: "For us, the participation in Cartoon Movie in the past two years was very helpful for the additional financing needed from outside our own territories, securing pre-sales up front and also building our network with distributors and broadcasters that were interested at an early stage. (Our first presentation was in 2012, followed by commitments after 2013.) Now we have the possibility to come back and show everyone the finished film, to follow up with previous contacts, show it to new potential buyers and close some more deals for the movie."

***Beyond Beyond* will premiere April 10 in Denmark, followed by releases in France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Russia and South Korea. The German free-TV rights have been acquired by Super RTL.**



Growing Pains

Oscar-winning director Torill Kove tells us a few things about her charming new animated feature, *Hocus Pocus, Alfie Atkins*. by Ramin Zahed

An imaginative young boy who loves magic tricks and dreams of owning a pet terrier learns a few life lessons in the charming 2-D-animated Norwegian feature *Hocus Pocus, Alfie Atkins*. The movie, which opened in Norway last summer, is one of several hot European titles screening this year at Cartoon Movie. The film's director is Torill Kove, who is best known for her 2006 Oscar-winning short *The Danish Poet*, as well as her Oscar-nominated 2004 short *My Grandmother Ironed the King's Shirts*.

Kove, who is based in Oslo, was kind enough to answer a few questions about her most-recent project via email. She says she became interested in the *Alfie Atkins* project when producer Kristin Ulseth from Maipo told her about the script, which was based on the popular book series by Gunilla Bergström. "I thought the script was very good and it's based on a such a wonderful book series," says Kove. "It also seemed like a really good opportunity to work with Norwegian and Scandinavian animation professionals."

The film's animation production, which was mostly done in China, took about 2½ years and cost about \$4 million. According to Kove, the animation was hand drawn on paper and scanned and colored digitally, but the studio was very tight-lipped about what software it used.

One of the toughest aspects of the creation of the film was the fact that the production was divided between the producers in Norway and the animation studio in China, while Kove herself lived in Montreal during half the production. "It seemed like someone around the world was always working on it," she says. "And of course, it's no picnic to direct a first feature. It is challenging because there are so many new skills required and not much time to learn. And deadlines are pretty firm. Adapting the book style to film was also a tricky code to crack. It's a bit daunting to work with a universe that's so well known."

Looking back, though, Kove says it's all been worth it. "I think *Hocus Pocus, Alfie Atkins* has a very lovely humanity to it," she says. "That trait is very typical of Gunilla Bergström's books. I think it's also, strangely enough, quite unusual these days to have a main character that is just a regular boy – not an animal, not someone from the future, no magical powers and not an orphan (although Alfie's mom is kind of absent). Visually,



too, I think it looks quite unique. It's inspired by the books, so it has the same characteristics of Bergström's style."

When asked to compare directing a big feature to a smaller animated short, Kove says it's like comparing apples to oranges and that she loves both formats for different reasons. "Perhaps the biggest difference is between directing something based on a script I have also written, versus something conceived by someone else," she says. "They are very different experiences. Both good and interesting, but challenging in different ways."

So how does she feel about the big animation boom we are seeing all over the globe? She responds, "There is no reason why animation shouldn't get better and better. More people are doing it, and there are lots of talented people interested. But I wish there was more funding for independent features."

Kove, who is putting the finishing touches on a new 2-D short called *Me and My Moul-*

ton (co-produced by Canada's NFB and Norway's Mikrofilm), believes in animators who persevere and continue to work in their own personal and unique styles. She names Pjotr Sapegin, Paul Driessen, Janet Perlman, Don Hertzfeldt and Joanna Priestley as a few of her favorites. "There are many more," she says. "My point is that I admire and look up to people who persevere, animators who have developed a recognizable style, and who are trying to say something with it."

She is also quite optimistic about the future of 2-D animation. "I think because drawing is a pretty primal activity, just like playing music and writing, there will always be room for 2-D animation. That's why I am, perhaps wrongly, not so concerned about the future of 2-D animation. I think people will just keep doing it. After all, drawing is a very expressive art form, and I don't think it's going away."

Not as long as we have gifted artists like Kove to brighten the path. ♦

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In Pursuit of Art and Quality Content

This year's Cartoon Movie in France will highlight bold, new features that are unafraid to tackle tough, noncommercial subjects.

If you are a firm believer that some of the best animated movies of the past few years were made by European auteurs for a fraction of the cost of Hollywood studio blockbusters, then you need to keep an eye on the rich selection of features unspooling at the 16th edition of Cartoon Movie.

Taking place March 5-7 in Lyon, France, the Euro-centric event is showcasing 59 bold, original animated movies, attracting 200 potential financial bigwigs and distributors from 40 countries. (Yes, U.S. indie animators, it's OK to feel quite envious of this setup!)

According to the event organizers, the lineup features an eclectic mix of styles, formats and content. Interestingly, 30 percent of the selection aims for young adult and adults – that's twice as many as the 2013 titles – and these Euro pics aren't afraid of tackling tough subjects, zeroing in on political and psychological themes and even using animation to illustrate documentaries.

Among the European countries, France

continues to be the most industrious producer of animated features, leading the race with one-third of this year's selection. Norway is next with six titles; followed by Finland, Germany, Italy and Poland with four; and Hungary, Ireland and the U.K. with two movies each.

It's interesting to point out that Cartoon Movie has facilitated 215 films presented to enter into production and be released around the globe, since its inception in 1990.

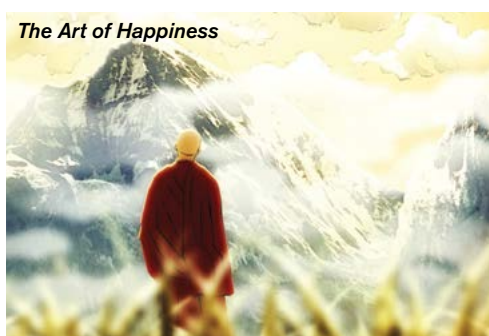
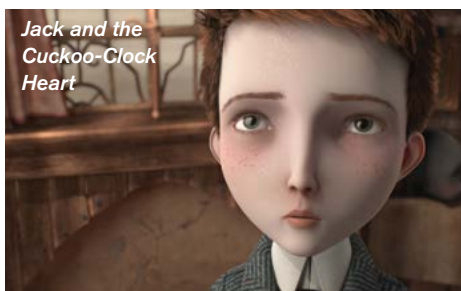
Literature and comic books continue to play a big part in inspiring Euro features. This year's selection ranges from adaptations by well-known authors such as Haruki Murakami, Prosper Mérimée and Guillaume Laurant to popular children's series and books like Germany's *Maya the Bee*, Finland's *Moomins* and Sweden's *Alfie Atkins*, as well as graphic novels like *Zombillenium* by Arthur de Pins and *The Bellybuttons* from Quebec.

Video games are also represented by Anka-ma's *Dofus* and the Spanish-Canadian title *Magic Veil*.

The selection is composed of 26 projects in concept, 16 in development and 10 already in the production stage and scheduled to premiere in 2014. The event also will screen seven features in their entirety. They are:

- ***Aunt Hilda!***
(directed by Jacques-Remy Girerd)
- ***Beyond Beyond***
(directed by Esben Toft Jacobsen)
- ***Hocus Pocus, Alfie Atkins***
(directed by Torill Kove)
- ***Jack and the Cuckoo-Clock Heart***
(directed by Mathias Malzieu)
- ***Minuscule: Valley of the Lost Ants***
(directed by Thomas Szabo and Helene Giraud)
- ***The Art of Happiness***
(directed by Alessandro Rak)
- ***Solan and Ludvig's Christmas***
(Rasmus A. Sivertsen)

To find out more about each one of the new movies, visit www.cartoon-media.eu.



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Animating the Souls of Objects

Japanese director Shuhei Morita talks about his influences and the making of his Oscar-nominated short, *Possessions*.

Shuhei Morita's haunting animated short *Possessions* is arguably one of the most intriguing nominees in this year's race for the Best Animated Short Film Oscar. The 14-minute film is set in 18th century Japan and centers on a man who loses his way during a stormy night and comes across a mysterious shrine in the mountains. After he discovers discarded kimonos and abandoned umbrellas in this world, he selflessly sets out to mend each one of them.

Possessions is part of Katsuhiro Otomo's *Short Peace* anthology project, which also included Otomo's 2012 short *Combustible*. Morita was kind enough to answer a few questions about his acclaimed short via email:

Animag: Can you please tell us about the origins of the project and how you created the animation?

Morita: It is a peculiar theme in Japan that ob-

jects possess a spirit ... I had conceived some projects based on this concept, for which I was inspired by the picture books created by Mr. Keisuke Kishi, a model/sculpture artist. I asked him to create some scenarios and illustrations of the Japanese traditional ghosts, and I began to construct a simple story based on them. Ghost stories tend to have "fight" or "escape" themes, but while I was pondering it from other angles, an idea came to me. Then I was able to picture

everything spontaneously.

Can you elaborate on the title of the film? It seems to resonate on different levels.

Tsukumo-gami (the original Japanese title of the film) is an old thing possessed by a spirit. *Tsukumo*, meaning 99 in Japanese, also means "long" or "many." *Possessions*, the English title of the film, has such meanings as occupied or hounded by something, which sounds quite good and

appropriate. Since the film can be enjoyed visually and is not dependent on dialogue, it has received favorable responses at foreign film festivals as well. The Japanese traditional ghosts appearing in the film were a bit unique, or peculiar, so they may be recognized by seeing the film repeatedly, say more than five times. I am happy that the film can be enjoyed in such a way.





When did you decide to be an animator?

When I was a college student. I really liked watching foreign science-fiction and fantasy movies. Meanwhile, I felt that there were Japanese anime titles of equal or better quality than what I was watching, so I thought, "I want to get involved in anime." The more I understood anime, the more interested I became in the processes (script, storyboard and the characters' expressions) of creating one.

How did you come up with the visual style of the short?

I believe it came from being born and raised in Nara, known to be a rich source of Japanese culture. I was interested in nature, culture, history, folk stories and tradition there. Needless to say, I love Japanese ghost stories. Old Japanese folk stories usually don't have big action scenes or surprising twists; they are very simple. But I was more and more interested in this genre. I thought, "Isn't this one style of new (but old) entertainment!?"

Tsukumo-gami is a folklore concept that objects which have existed for a long time become alive and have souls. I wanted to try to show these objects in the shrine having real existence. So, I focused on the 3-D textures of clothes and other items as well as the basic concepts of the drawings in the hope that those characters might have designs that gave rise to unique sounds, such as "ding," "bang," "crack," etc. The ghost that appears in the final part of the film is con-

structed of these objects. Though it looks complicated, we were able to create it rather easily – in our way [laughs].

The ghost is made up of only about 20 components, but using 3-D CG technology (LightWave software), we could make them look different by changing the angles and layouts. The "traditional" color palette was not intentional, but came from our use of patterns. It would have cost a lot if we had it designed and colored by professional designers. ... Fortunately, I have a small child, and I was inspired by the colored traditional craft papers (called *chiyogami*). Like skin color for skins, blue for blue things, I selected the traditional colors from the existing craft papers, within limit of the budget. I originally thought the Japanese red and green were beautiful colors, and as a result of using those colors, the final coloring was rather Japanese. Then I found a mole on a man's face, which was not on the original design or on the model, mysteriously. It turned out to be a little piece of dirt on the craft paper and was scanned in by accident. It was an unexpectedly nice effect, so I instructed the artists not to remove it – I was lucky to have such an interesting accident!

How long did it take for you to finish the short at Sunrise Studios?

It took about four months to finish with a small staff. We have worked together for a long time, so I wasn't worried about team's technical skills! I am still young in this field, so we did it with pure enthusiasm. It was hard to complete a lot of work with so few staff, but we worked



Shuhei Morita (above) tapped into his lifelong interest in Japanese culture and folklore in coming up with his Oscar-nominated short film, *Poses-sions*. The 14-minute film follows an 18th century man who discovers an abandoned shrine with torn kimonos and umbrellas, and sets out to repair each and every one of them.

together pleasantly and flexibly according to the circumstances.

Can you tell us what you're working on next?

For now, it is a secret, but I will announce it in the near future. What I can say is that I hope to deliver lots of big action and surprising entertainment next time!

What do you enjoy about working in the short-film format?

I believed that the challenge of presenting Japanese folk stories in an entertainment format could only be done through shorts. In the case of short films, there are two ways of creating them. One is to have a large volume of ideas so that it overflows from the plate, another is to concentrate and simplify the story so that it will fit on the small plate. *Possessions* is the latter. We made it very simple; nothing extra is added. I'm attracted to flashy styles such as [illustrated book] *Hyakki Yagyo* or [woodblock artist] Utagawa Kuniyoshi, because I really like Japanese ghosts. But the time format is too short for that, and it meant I couldn't create the Japanese ghosts that I imagined. It was very challenging to make it short, but I think I was able to visualize the entertainment of Japanese folk stories.

Do you have any advice for animation students want to create original, artistic shorts like yours?

I think *believing* in your work and your abilities is very important. I didn't have any confidence when I was a student, but I had a strong desire to make animation some day. There are so many talented people in the animation industry. You need to accept advice from others, learn from others, grow and believe in yourself, that you will make a film some day! ♦

Your Animation & VFX Oscar Ballot

Here is an Oscar ballot featuring only the animation and visual-effects-related categories, so you can really focus on the important races during the telecast! The winners will be announced at the 86th annual Academy Awards ceremony on Sunday, March 2, at the Dolby Theatre and televised live on ABC starting at 7 p.m. ET (4 p.m. PT). You can view the complete list of nominees at oscar.com.



Frozen

Best Animated Feature

- ☐ **Frozen** (directed by Chris Buck and Jennifer Lee) Disney
- ☐ **The Croods** (directed by Kirk DeMico and Chris Sanders) Fox/DreamWorks
- ☐ **The Wind Rises** (directed by Hayao Miyazaki) Disney/Studio Ghibli
- ☐ **Despicable Me 2** (directed by Pierre Coffin and Chris Renaud) Universal/Illumination
- ☐ **Ernest & Celestine** (directed by Stéphane Aubier, Vincent Patar and Benjamin Renner) GKIDS

Best Animated Short

- ☐ **Feral** (Daniel Sousa and Dan Golden)
- ☐ **Get a Horse!** (Lauren MacMullan and Dorothy McKim)
- ☐ **Mr. Hublot** (Laurent Witz and Alexandre Espigares)
- ☐ **Possessions** (Shuhei Morita)
- ☐ **Room on the Broom** (Max Lang and Jan Lachauer)

Best Visual Effects

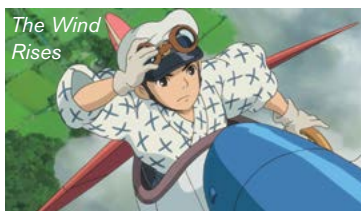
- ☐ **Gravity** (Tim Webber, Chris Lawrence, Dave Shirk and Neil Corbould)
- ☐ **The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug** (Joe Letteri, Eric Saindon, David Clayton and Eric Reynolds)
- ☐ **Iron Man 3** (Christopher Townsend, Guy Williams, Erik Nash and Dan Sudick)
- ☐ **The Lone Ranger** (Tim Alexander, Gary Brozenich, Edson Williams and John Frazier)
- ☐ **Star Trek Into Darkness** (Roger Guyett, Patrick Tubach, Ben Grossmann and Burt Dalton)

Best Original Song

- ☐ **"Happy"** from *Despicable Me 2*
(Music and lyrics by Pharrell Williams)
- ☐ **"Let It Go"** from *Frozen*
(Music and lyrics by Kristen Anderson-Lopez and Robert Lopez)
- ☐ **"The Moon Song"** from *Her*
(Music by Karen O; lyrics by Karen O and Spike Jonze)
- ☐ **"Ordinary Love"** from *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom*
(Music by Paul Hewson, Dave Evans, Adam Clayton and Larry Mullen; lyrics by Paul Hewson)



The Croods



The Wind Rises



Despicable Me 2



Ernest & Celestine



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He Has a Way with Words!

Wally, the star of the new preschool series *Wallykazam!*, helps spread some preschool literacy magic on Nick this month. by Ramin Zahed

If you were going to teach kids about words and literacy, what better way than to get some help from a clever forest troll, his pet dragon and a cast of magical creatures? That's exactly what *Wallykazam!*, a new preschool animated series, sets out to do on Nickelodeon this month. Created by Adam Peltzman (Emmy-winning writer of popular toons such as *Backyardigans*, *The Octonauts*, *Peter Rabbit* and *Bubble Guppies*), the show embeds a literacy curriculum into a full-length adventure as Wally the troll, with the aid of his magic stick, shows kids how to form words using a specific letter, sound or rhyme.

Peltzman says he began his new venture by asking himself the question, "What's fun about words?" Then, he came up with this idea of a kid who could use words to playfully transform the world around him. "It seemed like a great way to make words fun and powerful for kids, and it fit so well with animation – lots of opportunities for gags and surprising story twists," says the show's creator. "Then I started figuring out who this kid was and what the world around him was like. For a brief minute, I considered setting it around a boy and his dog in the modern world, but quickly scrapped that for a more fantastical take because I liked

having the freedom to invent new creatures with weird names, like Borgelorps and Fruzlewuzzles. So the boy became a troll, the dog became a dragon and the troublemaker kid in the neighborhood became a goblin with exceptionally large ears."

Visual cues for the series came from classic fantasy worlds like Middle-earth as well as beloved properties like *The Muppet Show* and *Looney Tunes* cartoons. Thanks to the work of the show's art directors, Jeff Tucker and Jennifer Taylor, Peltzman was able to zero in on the whimsical and memorable look of the show.

The Evolution of Wally

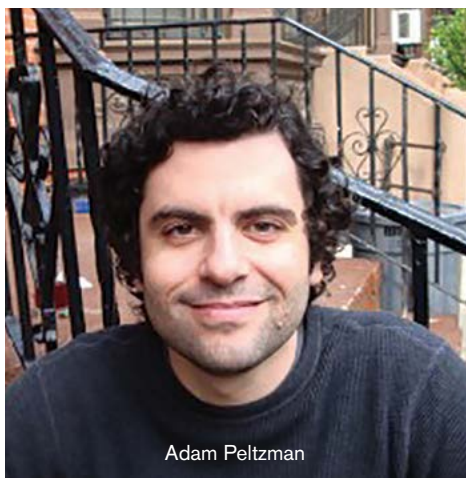
The development process for the CG-animated series began about three years ago, with a five-minute short that was designed to tease the idea and introduce the main characters. "Originally, it was supposed to air as a short, but Nickelodeon thought the idea had promise as a series, so they held the short and commissioned a longer pilot," says Peltzman. "As always, there were some changes throughout the process. Wally had other names, and the show had other titles. But despite the time and the changes, it was a really fruitful period – we learned a lot, and were able to hit the ground

running when we got to series."

One of the stand-out qualities of *Wallykazam!* is the way the literacy curriculum is cleverly mixed with strong narrative and comedic elements. As Peltzman explains, the story never stops for a game or for a stand-alone curricular segment. Instead, the narrative leads, and when Wally needs a word, there will be a curricular beat that moves the story forward and keeps preschoolers laughing and engaged.

"Each episode features a rule for the magic words of the day – for instance, words that start with 'M' or 'H' or words with a certain rhyming sound," he says. "So one day, Wally and Norville (his pet dragon) are on a mountain of marshmallows drinking milk, the next they're on hopping hamburgers. We've catapulted into castles and walked on waffles and parachuted from a pickle with a propeller. Many times during the first season I've looked at a scene and said, 'Well, I don't think that's ever happened on TV before.' So there's sort of a playful, delightful absurdity that I think (hope!) kids will enjoy."

Of course, the first season of a show is often the most challenging since there are so many different problems to solve and questions to answer. "We're always trying to figure



Adam Peltzman

out a process that works best for our particular show – for instance, how to integrate the 3-D and 2-D elements, or how to work with smaller sets so that we can travel to more places without breaking the budget,” says Peltzman. “Because so much of it is new and different from other shows we’ve all worked on, there’s no road map, so we’re simultaneously creating the show and the road map as we go.”

Putting It All Together

The results of the production team’s labor (based at Nickelodeon Studios in Burbank) has made it all worthwhile. Peltzman says he really enjoys watching the show, even though it’s for young children. “There’s always something that makes me laugh or smile,” he says, sounding like Wally’s proud father. “That’s the result of having a lot of extremely talented people working on the show who all put their own creative stamp on the work. ... It’s really rewarding to see all the separate elements of the show – the writing, the voices, the art, the music – all come together in the finished product.”

A huge fan of evergreen shows such as *Looney Tunes*, *Rocky and Bullwinkle*, *Woody Woodpecker*, *The Jetsons* and *The Flintstones*, Peltzman says he always really loved Saturday-morning animated comedies. He also says he’s very pleased with the great variety he sees today in the kids’ TV animation landscape. “I have a lot of friends writing and working on various animated shows, and some of them are so weirdly wonderful and absurd,” he says. “I do wish there were more opportuni-

Wally the Wordsmith: Nick’s new animated series *Wallykazam!* introduces preschool viewers to the magic of words, as a boy named Wally Trollman and his pet dragon, Norville, enjoy magical adventures with their forest friends.



ties in New York – there are a lot of talented animation artists here, but not quite as much going on as there was a decade ago.”

Of course, we won’t leave Wally and Norville’s creator alone until he shares some good career advice for aspiring children’s show creators. He says, first of all, you have to start with an idea that genuinely sparks something for you. “With preschool, it’s certainly important to know the audience – there are certain ways that young kids process information and learn that are very different from how older audiences think and learn,” he says. “But once

you have a handle on that, you really have to trust your own storytelling instincts. Because if you don’t find what you’re working on funny or interesting or exciting, chances are the 4-year-olds watching won’t either. So they’ll turn off the TV, or switch over to *Downton Abbey*. Preschoolers love *Downton Abbey*!”

Maybe, but something tells us Wally is a lot more fun to hang out with than those uptight, upper class Brits!

***Wallykazam!* premiered Feb. 3 and airs weekdays at 1 p.m. on Nickelodeon.**





Got to Catch Them All!
Cartoon Network and LEGO's *Mixels* introduces viewers to several tribes of collectible little monsters that can be combined in numerous ways to make more misfit creatures.

The Mixel Invasion Has Begun!

Cartoon Network and LEGO join forces to introduce the world to cute, collectible monsters called Mixels. by Ramin Zahed

Last summer, right around Comic-Con, LEGO fans were thrilled to learn that Cartoon Network was planning a major new project with the Danish toy giant. In February, after months of anticipation, the property, which is called *Mixels*, makes its premiere on the toon cabler, as well as launching its presence online and in toy stores.

So, what exactly is a Mixel? Well, this is what we know: They are cute, little (and, of course, collectible) monsters that can be mixed and matched in numerous combinations. The colorful first tribe, which arrives in February, is made up of three different kinds of Mixels: The Infernits, which provide fire; the Cragsters, which are builders; and the Elecroids, which fight darkness with electricity. Oh, and they will be battling some other set of crazy monsters called Nixels. There are three characters in each tribe, and they all can "mix, max, or murp" together to produce seemingly unlimited variations.

Three tribes will be introduced in each release wave. But what really sets this franchise apart is how it really hits the ground running with well-laid plans for multimedia domination. *Mixels* will combine animated content online airing on Cartoon Network, a mobile game and collectible mini-sets of the characters (priced at around \$5 or \$6),

"We embarked on this plan to define new

ways to develop content here which would take the strength of what we do at Cartoon Network – animation and animators, and the ability to create new worlds and characters – and apply that to our partners who are in other businesses," says Rob Sorcher, the cabler's CCO. "What sets this apart is the way it really hits every touch point: digital platforms, TV, toys."

To help create the vision for the animated series, Sorcher tapped TV veterans John Fang and Dave Smith. "John had been more on the action side of the things, and Dave worked on the comedy shorts program at Cartoon Network. They didn't know each other, and I secretly hoped that they would get along. Fortunately, they did, because we wanted *Mixels* to be a comedy but also have the play dynamic of an action property."

Sorcher says not only did Fang and Smith get along personally and professionally, they also bonded over their love for LEGO. "Most animators tend to love LEGO, because it takes them back to their childhood, when they found the toys to be one of their first forms of creative expression," he says. "We told them we don't want you to just design the show, we want you to create a complete world. It could become a TV show, a series of shorts, an app, a game. We wanted to put real animators at the core of this project, even if it didn't end up being a series. We began

to design this world and the key characters, and the LEGO team would also build their own building-block versions for the toys. There's the digital animation team in Atlanta, as well as a team in Canada that produces the gaming version of *Mixels*." (The animation for the 2-D series is produced by Vancouver-based Atomic Cartoons [*Rocket Monkeys*, *Pirate Express*] using Toon Boom's popular Harmony software.)

Because there are so many different versions of the same characters, the creative teams had to work closely with each other to stay on the same page. "It was a complicated process, but it was made easy because there was very little friction between the teams, and everyone immediately understood the concept. It was a simple concept," says Sorcher. Surprisingly enough, it only took about 14 months from that first trip to Denmark to delivery date of the product and the series.

This month, Cartoon Network will debut the first wave of Mixels as a collection of shorts, in various lengths from 30 seconds to five minutes. The shorts will then be formatted as a 22-minute



Rob Sorcher



special on the air and go into a series version. The characters also are being introduced online at lego.com/mixels and mixels.com. There will be exclusive content on Cartoon Network and in the gaming version of the property. "If you like these characters, you can send them to a lot of places," says Sorcher. "The toys will allow you to get special access to the website, where you can see more of the characters. We really wanted to proceed in a nonlinear fashion here. We take our cue from the content – if it needs to be two minutes long, then we have a short; if it needs to be a longer story, we have the series format. It's all going to be anchored by the core of what we

think we're good at – animation and the creation of new characters and worlds."

"We know that kids want funny shows and fun games wherever they go," says Chris Waldron, vice president, Cartoon Network Digital. "Mixels gives them both by letting them play the gorgeous *Calling All Mixels* mobile game and letting them watch the videos on mixels.com whenever and wherever they want. The result is a new brand that is fun, funny and feels entirely native to this digital generation."

"What I love about the show is that we knew we had these great characters with fantastic combination possibilities, but we didn't know

what they would do, what they would sound like," says Sorcher. "What really amuses me now is how these stories are playing visually. Both David and John are not really verbal guys, so they came up with this hilarious caveman-type language for them. They use basic words and telegraph their sentences. They grunt things like, 'Taste good. Me go there!' Of course, we also hired great voice actors like Tom Kenny, but the whole caveman-type language of the Mixels really makes me laugh."

Mixels will launch Feb. 12 on Cartoon Network during *Teen Titans Go!*



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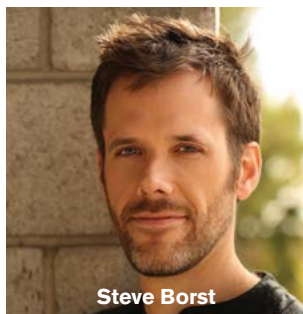
Breadwinners pits two intrepid ducks against the perils of the bread delivery business. by Mercedes Milligan

This month, Nickelodeon introduces viewers to the best-buddy heroes of its new 2-D animated series *Breadwinners*: two booty-shaking ducks named Sway-Sway and Buhdeuce who run a bread-delivery service in their awesome rocket-powered van. Created by Steve Borst and Gary "Doodles" Di Raffaele, the show combines rapid-fire humor with punchy designs and plenty of original music to keep tail feathers moving.

Launching the show is the culmination of years of friendship and collaboration between Borst and Di Raffaele, who met while they were both working on Warner Bros. Animation's *MAD* series. Back in 2011, Di Raffaele approached Borst in the break room about working together on personal projects outside of work. "I felt like I was being asked out on a date," Borst says. "But we sat down that November and checked out each other's stuff. I saw some shorts Gary had made that were really cool and fun and energetic ... Our creative chemistry was really awesome and it kind of snowballed into pitching to Nickelodeon later."

After a few months of playing with different ideas, a doodle Di Raffaele sketched of two ducks tossing slices of bread in the air set the creative duo off on a brainstorming session. Borst penned the story for a short film and Di Raffaele managed to produce it in just two months.

"Steve's the writer, I'm the artist — we're two halves of one brain," says Di Raffaele. "I'll come up with the drawings and he'll elevate them, take them to the next level with names and personalities." The artist adds that, despite this, the two executive producers collaborate on every step of production at Nickelodeon Animation in Burbank, trading comments and



Steve Borst



Gary "Doodles" Di Raffaele

ideas. "We're always trying to crack the code and get to the best thing we can make, at all times."

A funky new toon concept deserves a stand-out look, and the duo believes they've managed to hit the right note. By creating the 2-D animation using digital tools, the artists are able to keep the cartoonish looseness of the original short while sharpening up other

design elements. Di Raffaele notes that doing the original short in Flash and having to work around some limitations inspired the vivid, vector-like aesthetic of the show, adding that early 1990s videogames also served as design inspiration.

"I wanted something that felt like you were looking at a cartoon, which is why we use a heavy, black outline on the characters — something recognizable but also fresh," Di Raffaele says. "There's a lot of old-school video-game nostalgia in the art direction. We have this pixel texture that we apply to the background, and the characters have this kind of pixel shadow." Outside of preproduction and design, the show is animated by Titmouse Studio's Vancouver shop. "They're bringing this really unique flavor of animation that I haven't seen in a modern cartoon, ever ... it's this weird style that we've kind of stumbled upon."

In addition to cool throw-back design elements and rocket-van-delivery-mishaps, another stand-out element of *Breadwinners* is its musicality. There is a fairly constant beat running through the action so that SwaySway and Bahdeuce can pack in as much booty shaking as possible, and Borst and Di Raffaele say audiences can expect lots of original songs to come out of their beaks over the 20-episode first season.

What more could you want than a couple of ducks busting out an old-school rock ballad as they cruise the skies on their carb-loaded rounds?

***Breadwinners* premieres on Nickelodeon Saturday, Feb. 22, at 11 a.m. Check out animationmagazine.net to read the full interview with the creators.**



Ask a Baboon

by Mike de Seve

As head writers go, Baboon Animation team member **Carin Greenberg** is one of the busiest in the biz. An Emmy winner and eight-time nominee, Greenberg has masterfully helmed such hits as *The Octonauts* and *Lalaloopsy*, and has written for countless projects, including Nickelodeon's *Winx Club*, PBS's *Angelina Ballerina* and Disney Jr.'s *Chuggington*, *Jungle Junction* and *Doc McStuffins*.

Women in Animation's wonderful Lisa Goldman (somehow) managed to catch up with Greenberg to talk about her career, her craft and life in the writers' room.

Goldman: Can we *tawk*? What are your funniest or toughest moments being a woman writer in animation? As a story editor? In a writer's room? As a writer working from home?

Greenberg: I can't honestly say being a woman has had any bearing on my career. I'm a writer first, a disembodied creative mind, if you will, pulling ideas from the ether or guiding and shaping the ideas of others. That said, most of the writers I'm story editing on *Lalaloopsy*, which is aimed at little girls, are comedy dudes from L.A. For some reason, the masculine sensibility mixed with the feminine material makes for a good mix – keeps it funny without going too far into cutesy ... hopefully!

My toughest gig was story-editing *101 Dalmatians: The Series* for Disney. Toughest, first of all, because it was my first-ever animation job – which is only a distant cousin of live action, which I'd been doing for seven years – and, second, because we had to produce 65 half-hours in one year, roughly two and a half times the usual order. And this was before emails and Skype! I was talking to L.A. writers at two in the morning and falling asleep with piles of scripts on my chest. I'd sleep for six hours, then wake up and continue editing those same scripts.

The hardest part of being a story editor is the unevenness. Even my best writers sometimes have an off outline or script, which means I have to rewrite it from scratch. And I'm like: "Really? You really submitted that?" I don't actually say that. I am learning every day how to perfect my technique of giving criticism. I have a wonderful client right now who is so kind and polite when she gives criticism, and I try to emulate her. When I see an email from her beginning with "Unfortunately ..." I know she's going to give a

very polite negative review.

Working at home is both awesome and horrible. I can stay up late and work in my pajamas. But, some days, I don't even go outside. But the lack of exposure to sunlight has preserved my youthful skin tone far past its expiration date. I am like the undead.

Like my grandma would say, "What gives?" Like, why aren't there more of us?

Do you think about gender at all when you're hiring writers?

Not really. I'm just looking for good ideas, and a sense of

how to tell a story. I tend to get more usable submissions from male writers, but I don't think that's *because* they're male. The best, most talented story editor I ever worked for was, and is, female, and one of my favorite writers on my current series is also female, as am I. I think talent has no gender.

Women In Animation was born because of the "boys' club." How has it impacted your career?

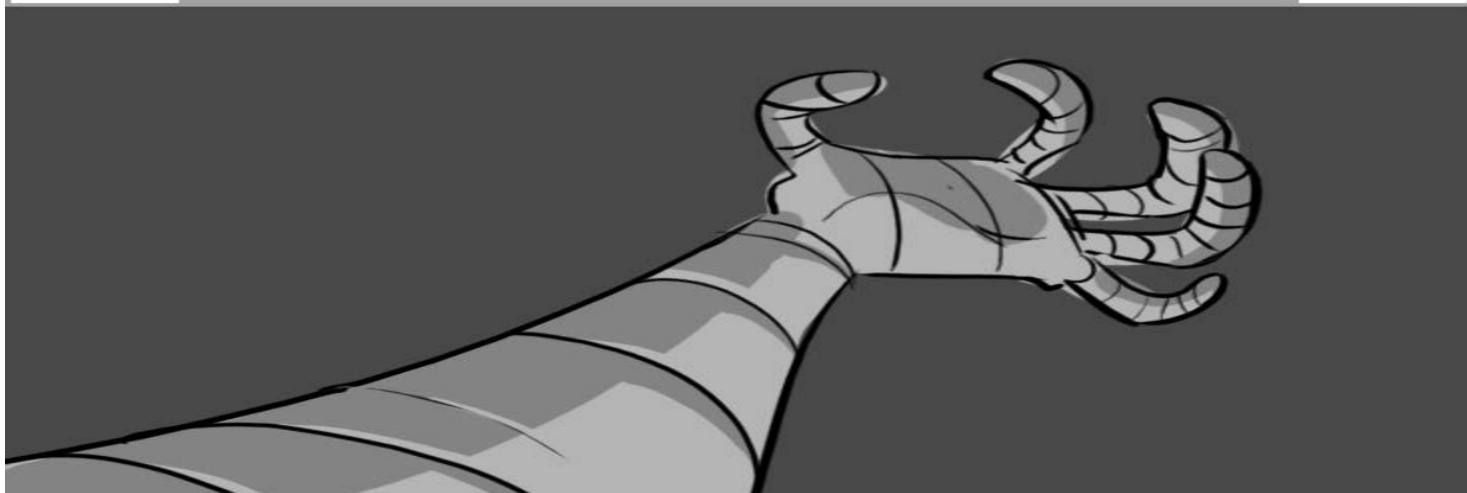
I don't feel it has. I'm not especially intimidated by a group of guys around a table in a writers' room. I'm pretty confident and have pretty thick skin. And I talk loud. There have been a few key people throughout my career who have taken a chance on me because they thought I could rise to the challenge. I really think it's about talent, not gender.

Baboon Animation is a U.S.-based collective of Oscar-nominated, multiple-Emmy-winning animation writers, with credits on dozens of the most iconic animated shows worldwide.

Lisa Goldman heads up the NYC Women in Animation Chapter. She also writes and creates content for all media platforms and teaches a course called "Pitch Bible Studies Class." Learn more at animateddevelopment.blogspot.com.



I have absolutely no idea. Maybe little girls don't grow up saying, "I want to be an animation story editor," because they don't know there is such a job. I certainly didn't. When I was a little girl, I knew I liked words and stories but told people, "I want to be an author and illustrator." In a way, writing for animation is being an author and an illustrator.



The Art of the Story

Online school CG Master Academy offers a rich selection of classes, including one on storyboarding for animation. by Ellen Wolff

A la carte is a term more frequently associated with restaurants than education, but that's how DreamWorks Animation modeler Manny Fragelus describes the online art school CG Master Academy. "With an a la carte model, you can take any class you're interested in," says Fragelus, who co-founded CGMA three-plus years ago with DreamWorks colleague Ted Davis and artist Lilliams Garcia. "We have students from all walks of life – from high-school kids to doctors, and hobbyists to professionals – who are thinking about switching careers."

CGMA courses run eight weeks and are structured around recorded lectures and weekly assignments that are evaluated by working professionals. Each week, there's also a live Q&A session with the instructor that students can log on to, and it's recorded and remains accessible to students online. Among the courses on CGMA's current menu is "Storyboarding for Animation," led by story artist Glenn Harmon (*Hotel Transylvania*) and featuring recorded lectures by Steven MacLeod (*How To Train Your Dragon*, *The Croods*). The course includes exercises

to help students visualize story ideas and build a starter portfolio.

"The focus of the class is not so much technical as it is about learning how to tell stories," says Harmon, who works alongside MacLeod in DreamWorks' story department. "You have to be able to draw in order to communicate. Even if someone is technically savvy, they still need to be able to draw something so that it communicates a story."

Harmon's own storytelling skills are notable,

having earned him the Gold Medal at the 2009 Student Academy Awards for *Pajama Gladiator*, his thesis film at Brigham Young University. Harmon then worked at Sony Animation before joining DreamWorks in 2011. Having been a student so recently himself, he expects that those taking the storyboarding class may be technically adept with digital tablets and Adobe Photoshop. "But they could do their assignments on paper and scan them in," he says. "Story has never depended on technology."

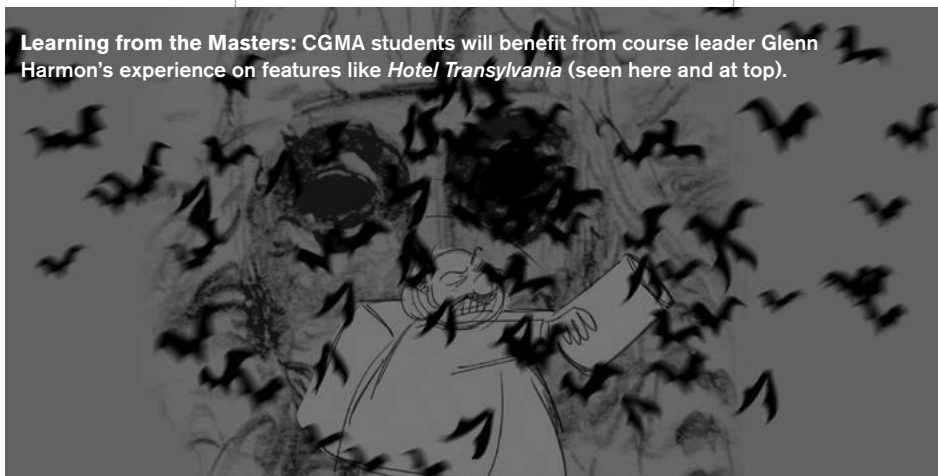
MacLeod agrees: "All that students need is a computer where they can upload images."

MacLeod's recorded lectures build upon traditional principles of storyboarding and reflect his own education at CalArts (he graduated in 2007) and his internships at Pixar and James Baxter Animation. MacLeod also has taught at CalArts as well as CGMA.

"I've structured the storyboarding lectures to maximize an individual's authorship," he says. "I try to remind students that everybody has unique experiences to draw from. But I also offer different prompts based on my ideas if they want to use them."

Based on his experience

Learning from the Masters: CGMA students will benefit from course leader Glenn Harmon's experience on features like *Hotel Transylvania* (seen here and at top).



"A storyboard artist has to be able to take a script – somebody else's work – and not only internalize it and 'plus' it, but then be able to take criticism and redo everything, and come at it with a new angle. Storyboard artists can't get too precious with anything."

– DreamWorks artist and CGMA instructor Glenn Harmon

Pro Visions: The Storyboarding course features recorded lectures from DreamWorks artist Steven MacLeod, who created this family scene for *The Croods*.



teaching the course several times, MacLeod estimates eight out of 10 students are specifically interested in storyboarding.

"Out of those eight, there are probably two that are pretty serious about applying for work." He laughs when he considers, "I might be training my replacement!"



Steven MacLeod

Cleaning Someone Else's Dog

Harmon wants to make sure that students leave the storyboarding class both with drawing experience and the ability to break down script pages.

"A storyboard artist has to be able to take a script – somebody else's work – and not only internalize it and 'plus' it, but then be able to take criticism and redo everything and come at it with a new angle. As a friend of mine says, 'It's not your dog. You found this dog and you clean it up, but you've got to give it back.' Storyboard artists can't get too precious with anything."



Glenn Harmon

Harmon says that storyboard artists should look at their work with a cinematographic eye. For example, he says: "Subjects on screen are often much smaller than story artists like to draw them. We like to draw things nice and big, and very prominent. But that's too much – especially if you're thinking about a 60-foot screen. You don't want an eyeball that's the size of a drum."

Given the fact that CGMA has teachers from DreamWorks, Sony, Pixar and Blue Sky, there tends to be a feature-film bias.

"This storyboarding class devotes time to industry routines and workflows. We show the process, but we remind them that this is just one view of the industry," MacLeod says.

Fragelus, who has worked in animation for 15 years, fully expects that the focus of CGMA's courses will broaden over time. "This is just a fraction of what on-line schools will be 10 years from now. The pool of students is so enormous."

Fragelus says 40 percent of CGMA's students are international. "It's fascinating to observe dialogue between them in our Q&A sessions. We had a student from Austria who's a sheep-herder taking a class with a student in Texas. As they were communicating, some sheep in the background began making noises. The student in Texas had a dog that started barking when it heard the sheep. Then the sheep started reacting to the dog and the sheep-herder had to leave the class! That's online teaching. You can't make that up."



Manny Fragelus

For more information on CG Master Academy, visit academy.cg-masters.com.



Meet the Shiny Future of Law Enforcement

VFX supervisor Jamie Price and production designer Martin Whist reveal some of the details behind Sony's *RoboCop* reboot. by Thomas J. McLean

RoboCop is back, now enhanced via the magic of the latest and greatest visual effects to be a true 21st-century vision of the future of law enforcement. The remake of Paul Verhoeven's 1987 classic *RoboCop*, which spawned two sequels, a pair of live-action TV series and two animated series, hits theaters Feb. 12 from Sony/Columbia with a whole new look for the iconic character.

Starring Joel Kinnaman as Alex Murphy and RoboCop, the new movie also features Gary Oldman, Michael Keaton, Abbie Cornish, Jackie Earle Haley, Jennifer Ehle, Jay Baruchel and Samuel L. Jackson. Directing is Jose Padilha, making his Hollywood helming debut after getting his start making documentary and narrative features in his native Brazil.

Padilha's vision for the film had an impact on the visual effects right from the start, according to Jamie Price, the visual effects supervisor on *RoboCop*. "[Padilha] really brought a lot of that documentary energy into the making of his narrative films," says Price, who supervised 1,070 effects shots produced for the feature by Framestore, Method, Cinesite, Mister X, Soho and Modus. "What that meant for us in visual effects is he liked to use a hand-held camera, he liked to keep things loose, he wasn't too concerned if actors didn't



always hit their marks exactly or if the camera framing was a little off."

That looseness had to carry over to visual effects, where artists are used to knowing early on the exact length of shots and how they are going to fit together. "Not so on *RoboCop*," says Price. "That was one of the really interesting challenges of it – how to design visual effects that really worked with this spontaneous style."

As in the original, the story follows Alex Mur-

phy, a Detroit police officer who is severely injured in the line of duty and turned into a cyborg law-enforcement drone by the private technology corporation OmniCorp. But despite his programming, Murphy's emotions cannot be suppressed permanently.

One of the challenges in designing an update for the movie is that robots and technology have become much more ubiquitous in the years since 1987. Production designer Martin Whist says the film takes inspiration from the original film and then brings it up to date in the near future when current technology like drones has advanced beyond today's capabilities.

"In the case of RoboCop himself, we definitely started with the original silver suit," says Whist. "I very much wanted to cue off of the design features of that suit, even going so far as to mimic the paint style on it. They used a kind of groundbreaking – at the time – technique, which involved multiple colors so that in different light, magentas would come out and in other lights it would come out sort of a blue-gray. I thought that was really interesting, so we did do that on our suit."

The film has the character evolve his look, going from a silver theme inspired by the original to a sleek, modern black suit that takes its cues from such diverse influences as Formula One

Visual effects touched every appearance of actor Joel Kinnaman in the RoboCop suit.



cars, the design of the 1979 film *Alien* and the B-1 Stealth Bomber, Whist says.

Though Padilha sought to do as much in-camera as possible, Price says every shot featuring RoboCop's suit is touched by visual effects in some way. "The main thing we knew we were going to have to be doing was what we called 'slimming,'" says Price. "We wanted RoboCop to have proportions so that when you looked at him you knew obviously there's no way anyone – no matter how skinny they were – could fit into that."

Slimming involved tapering the body, typically from the chest down to the knees; the thighs and the hips would be tapered down so RoboCop's silhouette was something that looked clearly not human, Price says. Effects also were used on all the major joints to show a mechanical interior for the character. There also were times when the visual-effects crew took over the character entirely, digitally replacing the entire body save for Kinnaman's exposed face and hands, Price says.

Additionally, effects were used on the character to convey the instances where he was using his robotic, superhuman abilities. There are scenes in which the character jumps higher, moves more quickly or uses more strength than is possible for a regular human, which required complete digitally replacement.

The brief for animating RoboCop was to bring the character into the present by giving him technological attributes that are extrapolated from today's technology, Price says. "That meant he had to be a fast-moving, precise, mechanical, controlled machine," he says. "Whereas there is kind of a rougher mechanical quality to the 1987 *RoboCop*, people today are used to what robots can do."

The Return of the ED-209

One of the most popular elements of the 1987 *RoboCop* was the ED-209, a walking military-style war robot that was created with stop-motion animation executed by industry legend Phil Tippett. For the new movie, a digital approach was used, though Price says it was done in a way that worked both for his animators and for Padilha's loose style of shooting.

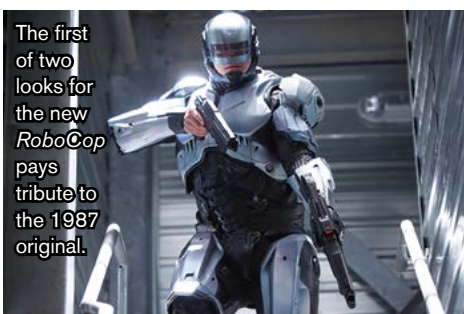
"For the ED-209, we fashioned an aluminum kind of wire frame stand-in that was the right size and shape of the ED-209," Price says. "And that really gave the actors something to act against, it gave the camera team something to frame and focus on, and I think it really enabled us to have that kind of spontaneous style."

Additionally, the wire-frame construction was easier for artists to paint out of each frame than if the stand-in had been a solid object. "We had a couple people who pushed it down the street, and as silly as it looked when we were doing it,



"The main thing we knew we were going to have to be doing was what we called 'slimming.' ... We wanted RoboCop to have proportions so that when you looked at him you knew obviously there's no way anyone – no matter how skinny they were – could fit into that."

– *RoboCop* vfx supervisor James Price



it really did give us the opportunity to frame and focus on something and have the actors play against something."

Animating the robots required some design tweaks, Price says. "We ended up modifying the original art department design a little bit in changing the way the legs work in order to make [the walk cycle] feel natural," he says.

The new movie also introduces a new model batch from OmniCorp, the humanoid EM-208s, which Price describes as a security force akin to a "futuristic, robotic version of boots on the ground." Since the EM-208s are humanoid, actors were used on-set to play those roles, working with a motion choreographer to get a robotic performance. They were then painted out and replaced with digital EM-208s.

The new movie is set in futuristic Detroit, as was the original – though Price says there was minimal modification of the city's skyline save for

adding the OmniCorp headquarters. Suggesting the futuristic setting came down largely to the uses of technology, adding high-tech computer designs and HUDs to blank on-set Plexiglas monitors.

Among the environment work was creating a look at the China countryside in a scene in which RoboCop escapes from a factory in that country. "We shot a very small rice-paddy set, about 15 feet by about 20 feet, and then extended the background with CG," says Price.

Additionally, the opening sequence takes place in Tehran, Iran, and was created by extending a 200-foot long set to give the city depth. "We extended some of the buildings up to three and four stories, and then for a couple aerial shots, where we shot backgrounds with cable-cam rigs, we extended the city multiple blocks," says Price.

Another virtual environment was created for the television set used by Jackson's character, Pat Novak, a bombastic television personality with a political agenda. "His TV show takes place on a virtual animated set, so we set up a 270-degree green-screen behind Sam and he stood on basically a shiny floor ... and then the entire background around him was entirely animated," he says.

Sony/Columbia will release *RoboCop* in theaters Feb. 12.

Tech Reviews

by Todd Sheridan Perry



Reallusion's iClone

IClone is now in iteration 5.5, with hundreds of animators, filmmakers and game designers not only using the software, but contributing to the Content Store, where you can browse and buy a gagillion characters, scenes and motions.

Version 5.5 is a big step up, with the advance of Reallusion's MotionPlus data format, which jams all the animation data into one file. Facial animation, body animation, props and dynamic spring effects all get mooshed in. Even the new bake constraint data – things like foot contact, picking things up, look-at's and path constraint – is included in the MotionPlus data. And all this info can be transferred between multiple characters. But don't worry! All you profes-

sional Maya, Max and Cinema4D users still can use the data through the FBX format. That way, all your work can be rendered with higher-end engines like VRay and Mental Ray.



The facial animation tool, Create Face, has been enhanced to make it easier to bring in a video of you talking and map the performance onto a 3D character. But iClone doesn't stop with characters. It also includes terrain-generation tools with Level-Of-Detail options; ideal for game development in software like Unity. Additionally, a bunch of easily swappable materials and skies are there to quickly create new environments. You even have a height-map editor to adjust or create custom mountain ranges. Do you want tanks driving through? The terrain has physics parameters that work with the iClone plug-in Physics Toolbox to help with vehicles and tracks (like tank treads).

Lastly, iClone is now available in 64-bit, an oft overlooked bonus. While most of the target demographic seems to be real-time games and hobbyists, I am very excited about the potential for smaller films to be able to use the iClone technology to develop pitch-viz – previz uses to raise filmmaking funds – and actual previz to help directors make choices before going onset with 150 people waiting for a decision.

Website: reallusion.com/iclone

Price: Pro, \$199.95; Standard, \$79.95

HP's ZBook 17

Hewlett-Packard has taken its EliteBook series of laptops, and reconfigured and rebranded it – the result being the ZBook mobile workstation, with the emphasis on the workstation part. It comes in three flavors: 14-inch, 15-inch and 17-inch. My review system is the 17-inch – a monster of a laptop.

The first thing to say about it is that it's pretty: A dark gray shell with soft, curved corners makes it pleasing to look at and touch. And it's not only the case: The ZBook sports an HD Dreamcolor display. The color and contrast makes your graphics intense – and furthermore, those graphics are driven by an NVIDIA Quadro K5100M with 8GB GDDR5 RAM.

The 17-inch ZBook is equipped with a slew of ports around the sides. Most notably, the ZBook, despite being a Windows box, has provided a Thunderbolt bolt for the newer high-speed drives that are normally connected to Apple products. Additionally, there is an SD-card



reader and a bunch of USB 3.0 ports, one of which is a dedicated power source for charged devices like phones – even when the Zbook is powered down.

The combination of the Intel i7-4900MQ dual 2.80Ghz processors, the 16GB of RAM and the NVidia card handled the Adobe Creative Suite like a dream. The Foundry's Nuke 8 floated along nicely, and both Autodesk's Maya and Max handled medium-weight tasks without a problem. In fact, the ZBook handled all my tasks supervising a shoot over the past week, which included rendering and exporting fairly intense particular renders to provide to Christie projectors. A case study, if I've ever heard one.

Downsides would be that the 17-inch model is pretty hefty – definitely built for use as a workstation, and not so much writing your screenplay at Starbucks. Additionally, my review station came with a 128GB SSD drive. While it's fast, I used up almost the entire drive for software. The good news? You can get a smaller model or you can install a larger drive.

Overall, it's super robust and should perform well for most tasks required in mobile situations such as being on set.

Website: hp.com

Price: \$1,849

The Foundry's Mari 2.5

Back at the end of October, The Foundry released the latest version of its Weta-born 3-D painting program extraordinaire, Mari, bringing it up to version 2.5 (with two sub-version releases since). The artists who have already been working with Mari know the power of it: painting on 3-D objects, near unlimited UV tiles, PTex support, elaborate layer functionality, Photoshop-like transfer modes and just a slew of brilliant tools to make texture-mapping exciting.

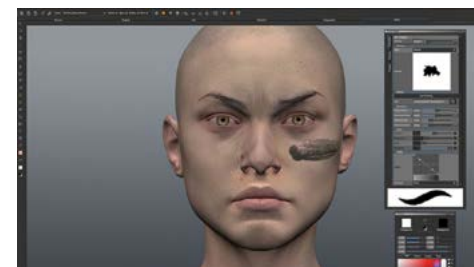
The biggest jump with Mari 2.5 is that artists hanging out over in Mac OSX on the Apple side of things can get into the act. If you are working in Mountain Lion (OSX 10.8.4) or above and have either an NVIDIA GeForce GT 650M or Quadro (Fermi Series) 4000, you are good to go. But, not to leave out Windows and Linux, the NVIDIA Quadro K Series (2000, 4000, 5000 – and presumably the up-and-coming 6000) are supported, which is a critical additional due to the amount of VRAM Mari can hog up.

On top of this, the Mari development team has kicked in a Custom Shader API to create new shaders alongside the default Mari ones – a system that has been reconfigured in these later versions. The API has been developed with special attention to coding syntax and behavior to make sure it's consistent with industry standards. This may sound a bit deep for average paint artists, but believe me, as an artist, if you have some coding guys backing you up, you are a happier artist.

Mari has established itself as the go-to 3-D paint system in the industry, and does not seem to be planning on losing that position. Loads of smart people continue to hack away at what Mari does well and refining it, as well as what it's not quite doing as well and fixing it. In this industry, one must always innovate – even if one is in the lead. The Foundry seems to be consistent about this across its whole software family.

Website: thefoundry.co.uk

Price: From approx. \$1,995



Todd Sheridan Perry is a vfx supervisor and digital artist who has worked on numerous features, including *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, *Speed Racer*, *2012* and *Final Destination 5*. You can reach him at todd@teaspoonvfx.com.

Animated Valentines on Disc

Forget chocolates and flowers – wouldn't your sweetheart rather have *Free Birds*, *The Jungle Book*, *Adventure Time* or a classic WB shorts collection? by Mercedes Milligan

Free Birds

[Fox, \$29.98]

The first feature from Texan toon house Reel FX, directed by Jimmy Hayward (*Horton Hears A Who!*), is a feather-ruffling, time-travelling CG comedy that shows that digital tech has reached the stage where indies can hope to compete with the big boys.

Starring Owen Wilson, Woody Harrelson and Amy Poehler, the film centers on two modern-day turkeys from opposite sides of the barnyard tracks who team up to go back to the 1600s and keep their species off the Thanksgiving menu.

The two-disc Blu-ray combo (\$39.99) comes with a small feast of extras: theatrical

trailer, "Birds Flipping History," "Animating Free Birds: The Main Course," "Winging It: Animators in Action," "Talking Turkey with Composer Dominic Lewis" and "Shake a Tail Feather." Now that America has emerged from its collective holiday tryptophan coma, it's the perfect time to enjoy this succulent comedy treat. [Release date: February 4]



Adventure Time: The Complete Third Season

[Warner, \$26.95]

Cartoon Network is offering up a brand spankin' new set of Penn Ward's Emmy-winning 2-D animated comedy on DVD and Blu-ray (\$32.07) this month. *The Complete Third Season* packs in all 26 episodes of the 2011-12 run, including the fan favorite,

gender-swap adventure "Fionna and Cake" (if you missed the previous so-titled DVD collection) and the two-part holiday spectacular "Holly Jolly Secrets." Yes, it's one crazy campaign across the Land of Ooo after another for Finn the human and Jake the magical dog!

Both the two-disc DVD and Blu-ray/DVD combo pack feature commentary for all of the episodes, an interview with Ward and

an alternate show introduction. And the fun continues off screen, since the specially die-cut BMO slipcase can be transformed into a collectible figurine. The best part of your very own cardboard BMO? He won't complain when you hit replay for the fifth or sixth time, unlike some housemates/boyfriends/magazine editors we could name.

[Release date: February 25]



Warner Bros. Home Ent. Academy Award-Nominated Animation: Golden Gems

[Warner, \$9.97]

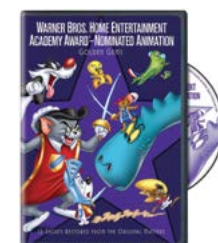
This single-disc release is fairly self explanatory: 13 classic shorts from the likes of toon legends Tex Avery, Chuck Jones, William Hanna and Joseph Barbera, which were nominated but did not win the Oscar. This follow up to last year's "Cinema Favorites" spans the 1940s,

1950s and 1960s. The featured, audio-visually improved films are: *Mouse Wreckers* (1949), *Hatch Up Your Troubles* (1949), *Jerry's Cousin* (1951), *Little Johnny Jet* (1953), *Touche, Pussy Cat!* (1954), *From A to Z-z-z-z* (1954), *Sandy Claws* (1955), *Good Will to Men* (1955), *Tabasco Road* (1957), *One Droopy Knight* (1957), *High Note* (1960), *Nelly's Folly* (1961) and *Now Hear This* (1963).

If these titles sound familiar, well, the truth

is that all of these were a part of the much heftier three-disc *Academy Awards Animation Collection*, released by WB in 2008 and boasting 15 Oscar winners and 26 nominees, plus special features – and now practically half-price on Amazon. This DVD is therefore ideally suited to OCD collectors or classic toon aficionados who need a cheap copy to lend out to acquaintances and untrustworthy children.

[Release date: February 11]



The Jungle Book: Diamond Edition

[Disney, \$29.99]

Wolfgang Reitherman's 1967 adaptation of Rudyard Kipling's beloved story about a feral boy and his animal friends and foes has re-emerged from the Disney vault as a sparkling, Diamond Edition release. If you're fuzzy on the details, the film centers on Mowgli (Bruce Reitherman), an orphaned "man-cub" raised by a mother wolf and looked after by carefree bear Baloo (Phil Harris) and serious minded panther Bagheera (Sebastian Cabot), deep in the Indian jungle. When the animals learn that the man-eating tiger Shere Khan (George Sand-

ers) has returned, they realize they must return Mowgli to the human world. As Mowgli fights to stay with his animal family, he also must contend with a hungry python named Kaa (Sterling Holloway), the manic orangutan King Louie (Louis Prima) and Shere Khan himself. The film features acclaimed music by the Sherman Brothers.

This DVD has more than just the "Bare Necessities": pick from film intros by Diane Disney Miller or Robert M. Sherman, tune into the audio commentary, sing-along with the movie ("Trust in Me," "Bare Necessities," "Colonel Hathi's March," "That's What Friends Are For"), check out the making-of featurette, "Disney's Kipling," "The Lure of The Jungle

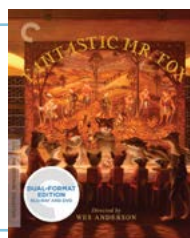
Book," "Mowgli's Return to the Wild," "Frank & Ollie," a music video of Jonas Brothers performing "I Wanna Be Like You," and "Disneylopedia Junglemania." Or, opt for the two-disc Blu-ray combo set (\$39.99), which additionally boasts an alternate ending ("Mowgli and the Hunter"), "@DisneyAnimation: Sparking Creativity," "Music, Memories & Mowgli" (with Richard M. Sherman, Diane Disney Miller and Floyd Norman), "Bear-E-Oke" hosted by Baloo with all sing-along tracks and "I Wanna Be Like You - Hangin' Out at Disney's Animal Kingdom." Either option offers plenty of toe-tapping, vine-swinging, big bear booty-shaking action for the whole family.

[Release date: February 11]



Honorable Mention: Fantastic Mr. Fox Director-Approved Edition

[Criterion Collection, \$39.95, Feb. 18]



In wintry Montreal, animated filmmaker **Janet Perlman** (*Bully Dance*) keeps warm toiling over ***Monsieur Pug***, a new 2-D short about a paranoid dog being produced by the Animation and Youth Studio (French Program) of the National Film Board of Canada. Learn more at www.janetperlman.com.



Hands-on director Janet puts the finishing touches on her canine hero.



At minus 24 degrees, even the locals admit it's a bit chilly in Montreal today.



Monsieur Pug centers on the hilarious antics of a troubled pet.



Welcome to the National Film Board of Canada!



Now entering "The Creative Dimension" ... what surprising challenges could await this day?



The short's marketing manager Geneviève Bérard accompanies the director through the stylish studio.



A creative new take on paper recycling: doggy origami!



Janet and producer Marc Bertrand discuss Mr. Pug's motivations for the new scene.



This is where the magic happens! Inspirational pugs greet the director from her door-cum-gallery.



No NFB office is complete without some cartoonish decor.



Posters for completed shorts, like Chris Landreth's *Subconscious Password*, line the studio halls.



Stop, collaborate, and listen: Janet chats with fellow NFB animators Janice Nadeau and Nicola Lemay.

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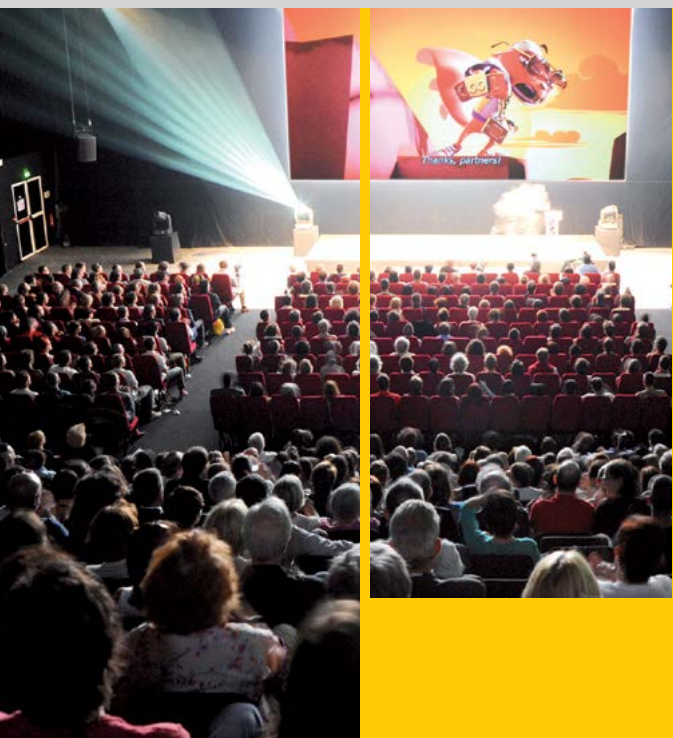
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industry -
project presentations,
meetings, debates,
conferences